INDRA DHANUSH

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN
NEW DELHI



A spirited performance culture is deeply ingrained in the edifice of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Entertainment at Rashtrapati Bhavan, has, almost always, included cultural performances - dance, music, theatre and cinema have been interwoven seamlessly into its way of life.

The present Volume- Indradhanush-II - is a retelling of performances held at Rashtrapati Bhavan between 2014 to 2016. It takes off from Indradhanush Volume-I which covered the period between 2012-2014, and seeks to enrich, and make the reader, a part of some of the finest performances by our maestros in the realms of theatre, dance and music. The Volume, while capturing the spirit of the performances, also tries to place them in the larger historical context of Rashtrapati Bhavan's performance culture. It is an ode and a testimony to the richness of India's performing arts as also a pointer to their vibrant future.

Front Cover: Bharatanatyam dance performance at the Rashtrapati Bhavan by Priyadarsini Govind

Back Cover: Performances at the Rashtrapati Bhavan by Gujarati folk dance troupe (top), Ao Naga Choir (centre), classical and folk artists (bottom)



RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI

INDRA DHANUSH

VOLUME II



INDRA DHANUSH VOLUME II, 2014–16
©2016 Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, India
Commissioned by the President's Secretariat, Rashtrapati Bhavan,
and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA),
Ministry of Culture, Government of India

Executed by Sahapedia

Project Mentor: Siddharth Sharma, internal financial advisor,
President's Secretariat
Edited by Bishnupriya Dutt

Photography by Avinash Pasricha, 2015–16
Other photo credits: Dinesh Khanna; Ram Rahman;
Rashtrapati Bhavan Photo Section; Seher, New Delhi

Researcher: Shrinkhla Sahai
Editorial Consultant: Samik Bandyopadhyay
Copy Editor: Dipali Singh
Designed by Alpana Khare
Production Coordination: V.K. Meena, Publications Division
Audio Curation: Shrinkhla Sahai
Audio Editing: Bijay Sadangi

Printed by Archana Advertising Pvt. Ltd., www.archanapress.com

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The contribution of Rashmi Malik, Spic Macay, in coordinating some of the cultural performances under Indra Dhanush is acknowledged.

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Price: ₹ 1200.00

PD BN ISBN: 978-81-230-2271-0
RB-ENG-OP-068-2016-17

Published by
Additional Director General
Publications Division
Ministry of Information & Broadcasting
Government of India

INDRA DHANUSH

VOLUME II

Edited by Bishnupriya Dutt

Photography by Avinash Pasricha



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Photo by Dinesh Khanna



PRESIDENT

REPUBLIC OF INDIA

FOREWORD

As I look back at Indra Dhanush, our in-house series of cultural performances over the past four years of my presidency, it has been both a joyous and a learning experience. The performances have shown first-hand the depth and the vast range of India's cultural tradition and the richness that the performers bring to bear upon it.

The Indra Dhanush initiative was started in 2012 with the objective of showcasing the magnificence of our performing arts. Rashtrapati Bhavan's evenings have, since then, come alive through an array of memorable performances by India's finest in the realms of theatre, dance and music: Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasia, Pandit Jasraj, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra, Girija Devi, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Priyadarsini Govind, Malavika Sarrukai, Begum Parveen Sultana, Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra and Shekhar Sen, to name a few.

The focus on promoting rare art forms continued with a virtuoso performance in September this year on the rudra veena by Ustad Baha'uddin Dagar. It is my hope that we, as a nation, shall continue to nurture and promote these art forms and not allow them to slide into extinction.

Art and music transcend limitations of time and space—the sublime performances that I and the audience have witnessed over the past four years bear testimony to this truism. I am delighted that these wonderful moments are now being documented for posterity in the second volume of Indra Dhanush covering the period between 2014 and 2016.

I wish the volume and the series well.

PRANAB MUKHERJEE
1 DECEMBER 2016
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN,
NEW DELHI

PREFACE

The Presidential Palace as a People's Heritage: The Idea Endures...

To preserve, promote and showcase India's incredible cultural diversity has been one of the centre-points of President Mukherjee's tenure. It is, without doubt, part of a larger canvas wherein presidents are sworn to not only preserve, protect and defend the Constitution but also commit themselves to the very idea of India and its civilizational values. As the thirteenth Presidency commenced, President Mukherjee's vision was focused on the 3Ds—demystification, documentation and democratization of Rashtrapati Bhavan. Expanding public outreach and enabling access to this treasure house of India's social, cultural and political history thus became the driving force behind every initiative undertaken at Rashtrapati Bhavan during these past four years.

Reinvigorating the cultural landscape; creating new public spaces in the form of the Rashtrapati Bhavan Cultural Complex (RBCC) and the Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum Complex (RBMC); inviting scholars, artists, students and innovators 'in residence'; organizing festivals of innovation and positioning Rashtrapati Bhavan as a model, 'smart' township—a blend of tradition and modernity—have all been part of the present president's vision of being citizen-centric and citizen-friendly.A series of publications, including *Indra Dhanush* (Volumes I and II) on cultural events organized in Rashtrapati Bhavan, create a scholarly narrative around the environment, gardens, architecture, art and other aspects of life at Rashtrapati Bhavan, as well as institutions such as the President's Bodyguard and the presidential retreats. This ambitious multivolume documentation project, comprising 13 titles, has been completed in collaboration with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting.

Photo by Ram Rahman



Indra Dhanush, the present as also the earlier volume, embodies the concept of India's cultural heritage being presented before the head of state in his role, albeit informal, as the patron of arts and culture. The present volume is a compendium of music, dance, theatre and cinematic presentations organized at Rashtrapati Bhavan from mid-2014 to September 2016.

During this period, we have presented a cultural kaleidoscope of extraordinary artistes of India. The artistes featuring in this volume include Pandit Chhannulal Mishra, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, Begum Parveen Sultana, Pandit Jasraj and Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra to represent different generations and different styles of the classical music repertoire. Other genres of music that have been taken to the stage are Madan Gopal Singh and the Chaar Yaar ensemble (Sufi music) and the Ao Naga Choir (Christmas carols and songs). Dance has been epitomized through Bharatanatyam by Priyadarsini Govind in a solo recital, Aditi Mangaldas in Kathak choreography and the dance dramas of the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra. Theatre has found resonance on the Rashtrapati Bhavan stage by way of Shekhar Sen's brilliant, mono-act portrayals of Soordas, Vivekananda and Kabir. Each of these performances has been documented, historicized and framed with fresh insights, paving the way for a deeper understanding and appreciation of our timeless cultural legacy.

We had started the Indra Dhanush series with the aim that we shall present, over time, performances by people accomplished in the field of art and dance, who are both the legatees and the guardians of a culture which is as rich and unique as it is multidimensional. I am confident that we have achieved our aim substantially, if not in full measure.

OMITA PAUL
SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT
1 DECEMBER 2016
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI

INTRODUCTION

The two landmark cultural events held at Rashtrapati Bhavan in 2015–16 were the cultural performances celebrating US President Barack Obama's visit to India (25 January 2015) and the India–Africa Forum Summit (29 October 2015).

Spectacular in its presentation, the performance in January was held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium in a beautifully choreographed 35-minute show, opening up the entire range of Indian classical dance. The intricate repertoire of each of these dance forms was presented as a comprehensive whole, with all of them coming together in a mesmerizing finale.

The cultural tribute to the African summit (October 2015) was staged in the regal Mughal Gardens with the magnificent Rashtrapati Bhavan edifice illuminated in the background as symbolic and overpowering scenography. On display was a visual panorama of classical dance along with an extensive range of performances drawing from folk forms (Chhau, Gotipua, Lai Haraoba, Garba), traditional vocal music (Sufi, Manganiyars, classical vocalists), modern Indian dance and carefully chosen representations of African dances, revealing civilizational connections. An ever-expanding, seamless range of cultural expressions overlapped like waves, encompassing the local, the regional, the national and in a way, the global.

The spaces of Rashtrapati Bhavan can be seen as performative locales, a scenario which generates its own meanings of history and politics even as the site itself emerges as the most imposing landmark of the country, a symbol of Indian democracy and its pluralistic ethos. This marks a vivid turnaround for a monument which was erected by the British to symbolize their might and dominance—democracy and good governance have truly struck root in the Indian nation.

Yamini Krishnamurthy performing at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on the occasion of a banquet in honour of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt and Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia, 21 October 1966



As citizens of India, every time we enter the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the auditorium, in particular, where the performances of Indra Dhanush—the monthly concerts of music, dance and theatre—are usually held, we can relive, in a way, the historical experience of the transition from subjecthood to citizenship. It dramatically opens up access to the most hallowed locale in India, a metaphorical liminal space which we cross to watch the performances. Once we enter the auditorium, built as a formal proscenium with all the facilities of a modern theatre, we experience both the spaces at once.

The ceremonial entry of the president, which marks the beginning of a cultural programme, registers, as nothing else could, the democratic space which emerges in a theatre. The president sits with everyone else, amidst other citizens, while the performers are on the elevated space of the stage, all hierarchies dissolving in that experience of being immersed in a performance. The current presidency, which encourages such cultural expressions, has made the performances a regular monthly event, identifying the locale every time as, 'Not a Presidential Palace but a People's Heritage.'[1]

The Rashtrapati Bhavan since Independence, has always been a significant site for cultural performances chosen to nurture the new culture emerging to represent the Indian nation and a new generation of performers who could create a rich repertoire befitting a country emerging from colonialism to becoming an independent State. In an extension of cultural diplomacy, there were occasions when international audiences were invited to engage in the experience. India, as a prime Asian nation and a leader of the non-aligned movement, played host to all the major political heads of the world, with cultural performances as an integral part of the summits.

In the national scenario, an invitation to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and the investiture of the national awards (the Sangeet Natak Akademi or the Padma Awards) annually held in its premises have marked the highest recognition of the artistes and their art forms.

It is important to emphasize that the process of reconstructing and charting out the national scene in the performing arts, with their vast range of regional cultural divergences—urban, rural, classical, traditional, folk and experimental—at multiple levels



Bolshoi Ballet ensemble at the Rashtrapati Bhavan with prima-ballerina Raisa Struchkova, 16 March 1966







Nurturing traditional (5 November 1960) and popular performances (29 January 1966)

and in many modes, required a long period of patronage, encouragement and what is most important, opening up spaces for performers and cultivating an audience to become conditioned to appreciating the arts. The classical arts, in particular, required a guided nurturing of connoisseurship as a reciprocal process of mutual exchange and communication. Even if a performance at Rashtrapati Bhavan is an occasional and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for both performer and audience, its practice at the highest echelon of the social and cultural milieu would percolate down to other spaces as cultural trends usually do.

Cultural diplomacy at the global level is part of an ongoing process. The international scenario has constantly evolved and our diplomatic initiatives and outreach reflect changing geo-politics. The African summit was, in a manner of speaking, the continuation of a historical process, which President Mukherjee so eloquently acknowledged, in his opening speech on the occasion:

'It is a memorable moment, when a century ago, the construction of the building you see before you had begun, it would have been difficult to imagine that India as well as so many African nations would discard their colonial chains, throw away the Imperial yoke and one day would stand together here to celebrate freedom, democracy and human thinking.'[2]

The current presidency initiated the systematic and regular cultural monthly programme. The *Indra Dhanush I* volume has covered the performances held between September 2012 and February 2014. In addition, it provided a detailed history of the evolution of the performance culture since 1947, in Rashtrapati Bhavan as well as in the larger national sphere, through its lead essays.[3]

The scope of *Indra Dhanush II* covers the performances held from mid-2014 to September 2016. The performances and the artistes represent a wide and diverse range of performances, from vocal classical recitals (Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, Ustad Rashid Khan, Begum Parveen Sultana, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra), classical instrument recitals (Baha'ud-din Dagar on the rudra veena), Sufi music (the Chaar Yaar ensemble), qawwali (the Nizami Bandhu), classical dance solo recitals (Priyadarsini Govind), classical dance choreography (Aditi Mangaldas), popular regional cultural ensembles (Gujarati folk music and dance and Onam festival performances), ballet (Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra) and musical theatre (Shekhar Sen). Besides the performances, there were film screenings (*Talvar* and *Bridge of Spies*).

The artistes are all leaders in the field and iconic representatives of their genres at the highest level of artistic excellence, supreme skill and mastery over their forms. The *Indra Dhanush I* volume mapped the biographical career graphs of the artistes, with the very significant last closing sentence for each one recording the date when they performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.[4]

All the maestros and artistes of ensembles we spoke to for *Indra Dhanush II* considered their performances at the Rashtrapati Bhavan an unforgettable landmark event in their lives.

Our intent in this volume, *Indra Dhanush II*, is to offer readers—who have not had the privilege of attending the performances—a feel of each performance and its memorable moments so that the reader, like the audience, can share the unique experience.

The artistes, performers and ensembles are some of the most skilled and renowned names

of contemporary India, so our objective was also to insert the voice of the artiste and make visible, in a way, the process of creation which lies hidden behind a show. The performances are the end-product of a prolonged process of rigorous training, rehearsals and preparation, and we sought to interweave these aspects through the testimonies of the performers and the descriptions of the performance, bringing into play a dialogue between the performers and their performances.

The three sections are not based on any strict generical division between music, dance, theatre or cinema since these categories were created out of a colonial knowledge system. We have chosen to foreground them against the three lead essays by three principal scholars in the field of performing arts. Professor of English and a music archivist and scholar Amlan Das Gupta, writing on Indian classical music and musicians, places the performers in a larger historical and socio-cultural framework. His essay follows from the eloquent and comprehensive lead essay by musicologist and art critic S. Kalidas in *Indra Dhanush I*, titled 'Music, Modernity, Nationhood, Raga Sangeet in North India'[5] and a similar mapping of dance practices in post-Independence India, 'Seeking Independence, Discovering Dance' by writer and scholar of Indian dance Leela Venkataraman.[6] Both the essays trace the evolution of classical music and dance through the cultural institutions of post-Independence India, seeking to envisage a new cultural vision and a process of democratization. Das Gupta historicizes the reception and dissemination of classical music as played on the radio in the 1950s and problematizes the consumption of classical music in contemporary times. The title of his essay, 'The Present of our Past: Reflections on the Indra Dhanush Recordings', prompts the reader to revisit the cultural milieu of the past and experience the memory of the musical environment of the past to locate the music of the present for its appreciation.

Theatre, film and art critic and scholar Professor Samik Bandyopadhyay's lead essay takes us through dance recitals, folk ensembles and music drama, a cultural history where the strict categories of music, dance or theatre fall apart to a seamless continuity that the Indra Dhanush project tries to retrieve and restore from a presidential-federal perspective.

The final lead essay by writer and broadcaster Geeta Sahai highlights the role of the 'accompanists' as 'collaborators' and her essay, while describing the various concerts held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, delves deeper into the role of accompanying artists, the art of accompanying and the difference between the perception of being called a collaborator or an accompanying artist and what prompts an accompanying artist to become a soloist. It is our tribute to all the musicians, dancers, performers and the immense hard labour that goes into the development of the performing arts to high levels of proficiency and excellence.

Given the contemporary times and the commercial ethos that governs the field of culture, as all other spheres, meaningful art forms find themselves marginalized. They require alternate means of nurturing and spaces which are run not only by economic motives but more as a recognition of their artistic potential. These art forms survive not because they are able to thrive within a free competitive market but because they can resist succumbing to market forces that determine value through merely profit or loss. They represent certain ideals and despite hardships, have an inner richness that never falters. The

Indra Dhanush performances show how they have even flourished, reaching new levels of finesse and mastery over the arts. The joy of fulfilment is in the pursuance of the arts. All our performers in their conversations emphasized that their fulfilment is in the recognition, not in commercialization of their art forms, which they nourish and continue to practise.

Rashtrapati Bhavan honours the nation's citizen-artistes through the Indra Dhanush programme.

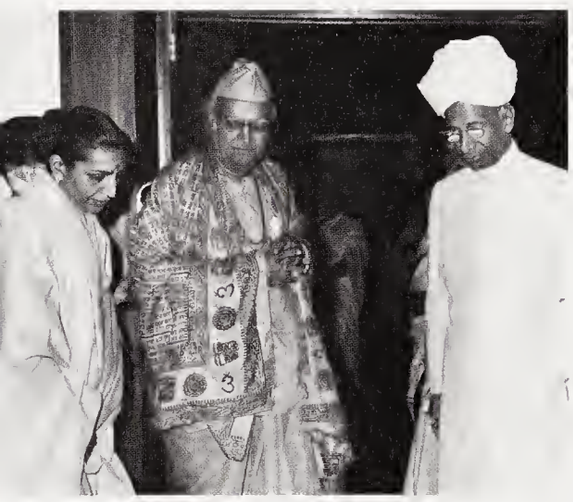


Banquet and performance in honour of Russian and Yugoslavian delegates, Damayanti Joshi, Aleksander Rankovic, the Yugoslav leader, Indrani Rahman; Kliment Efromovich Voroshilov, Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet, Roshan Vajifdar, Jyotishmati, Yamini Krishnamurthy, 20 January 1960

I

THEATRE AND FILM

TRADITIONS IN A DEVELOPING MODE



The Indra Dhanush programmes brought back memories and associations of the new concert culture of the late 1950s and the early 1960s, when the music conference mode of the 1930s and 1940s was slowly giving way to the more focused programmes featuring individual performers in independent presentations, allowing the audience the luxury of savouring a specific style. But a sense of convergences and connections was also there, maybe as a fallout of the concert culture that the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) and the Cultural Left of the 1940s had defined. I remember Sunday morning concerts at the New Empire Theatre in Calcutta (that is how Kolkata was known then) offering a double bill with Pandit Ravi Shankar and classical dancer Indrani Rehman; or Ustad Vilayat Khan and Kathak dancer Damayanti Joshi; and of course, the rich musical dialogue of Ali Akbar Khan and Nikhil Bandyopadhyay in a sarod–sitar *jugalbandi*, with the two instruments bringing into play their distinctive tonalities in the exploration of the same raga. The IPTA–Cultural Left intervention in the performing arts opened up platforms that could be shared by classical masters, folk performers and contemporary activist artistes. More often than not a humanist theme—such as conscientization against nuclear weaponry and war, commemorating a cultural figure like Rabindranath Tagore or the Hindi-Urdu novelist Premchand, or recalling an emancipatory movement—would frame the performances that in their turn would resonate with the issues.

Above: Dilip Kumar Roy at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 16 April 1966
Facing page: Pandit Onkar Nath Thakur being felicitated, 7 September 1955

I recall the legendary vocalist Sangeetmartanda Pandit Omkarnath Thakur addressing an audience of more than ten thousand gathered in Calcutta's Ochterlony Monument Maidan, the site of political mass rallies, on how lasting world peace alone can ensure the dissemination of classical Indian music among the masses of India. Before breaking into the bhajan '*Yogi, mato jaa*', followed by '*Vande Mataram*' (by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay), he stopped at times to underscore and explain how vocal and tonal shifts carry shades of meaning, turning the performance into a course in music appreciation.

Some of these different concert traditions and modes have gone into the making of the Indra Dhanush agenda that in its turn has expanded to address the concerns of a national-presidential-federal vision, incorporating local–regional celebratory performative practices like the Onam from Kerala or the invocation of the goddess Durga in West Bengal—reaching out to possibilities of transnational, transcivilizational performative encounters, bringing a wide range of Indian and African rhythms and movements into a loosely choreographed *mélange* (I cannot call it a fusion!). At the same time, there was provision for performances of living traditions with twenty-first-century musicians and dancers building on the practices handed down to them by their gurus, all twentieth-century masters; with Kathak dancer and choreographer Aditi Mangaldas taking off from Birju Maharaj and Kumudini Lakhia and Bharatanatyam artiste Priyadarsini Govind from Kalanidhi Narayanan. The Indra Dhanush programme also provides for experimenters drawing on the musical storytelling traditions appearing in so many forms and variations throughout the country, covering expressions like the Kathakata (recitation of mythological stories with annotations), Patua Geeti (folk songs sung by scroll painters in West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh), Pandavani (folk songs



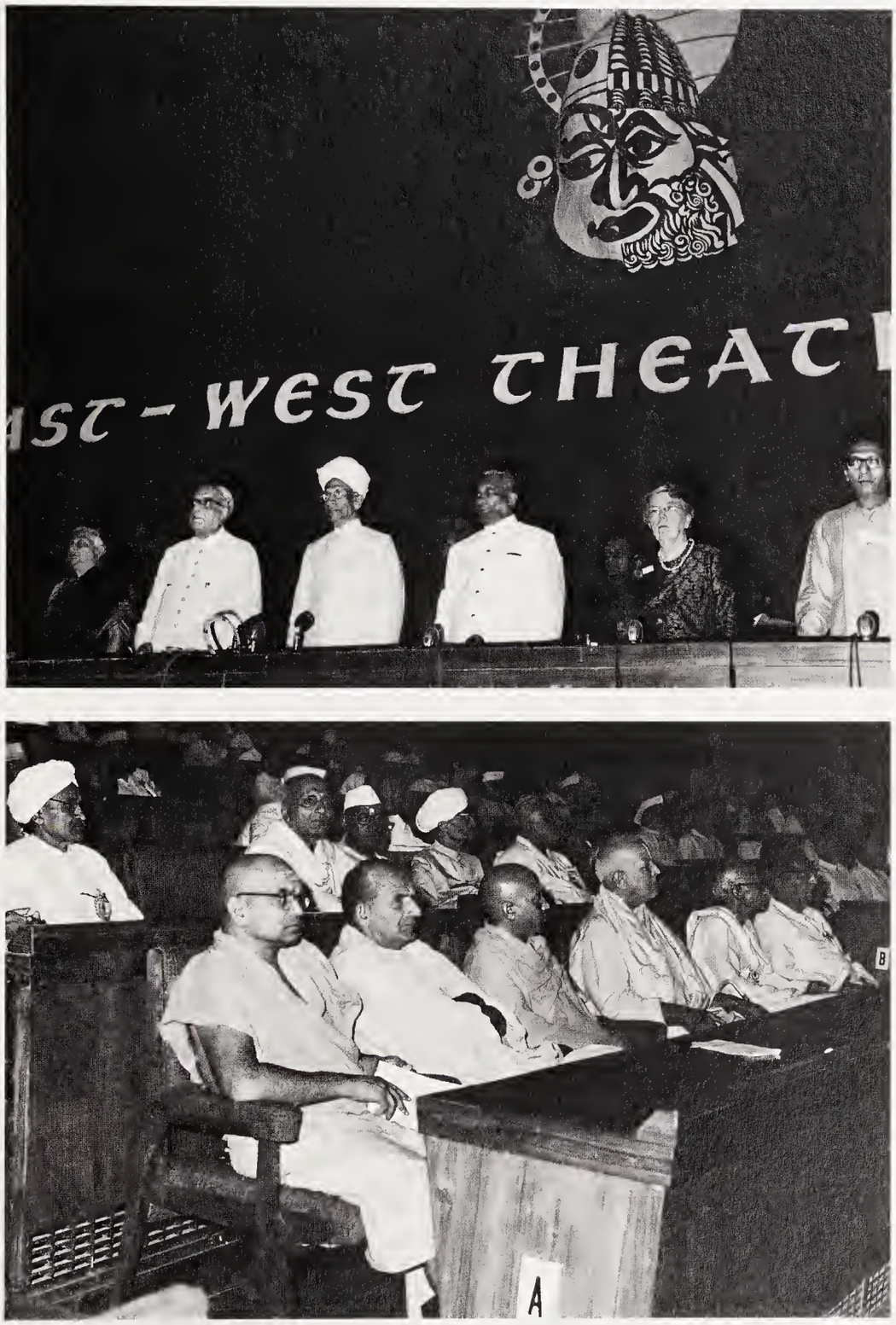
narrating tales from the Mahabharata) and Wari Liba (traditional storytelling by artistes from Manipur). An experimenter who performed in the Indra Dhanush programme was Shekhar Sen. He brought in history and myth to his retelling of the story of the itinerant blind saint-poet Soordas, enacting his singing to the evocation of bhakti (devotion to a personal god), his performance delicately balancing the traditional and the modern, the ceremonial and the biographical.

With cinema making an occasional entry into the Indra Dhanush scheme, the one major gap still is contemporary theatre in its distinctive manifestations in the embodiment of so many *bhashas* (the different regional languages of the country, with their local memories, myths and histories). As a genre, theatre uses the human body as its instrument expressing its 'meaning' through the interplay of the body with the voice, the several limbs and the body in its entirety. Different environments and histories construct the bodies and their expressions differently in the *bhasha* or language cultures of this country, even as they produce distinctive tastes and artistic perceptions. Modern Indian theatre thus offers a cultural panorama rich in diversity.

One hopes that theatre, too, will find its place in Indra Dhanush in the near future and offer the audience a different taste of our rich, diverse and thoughtful performance scenario that nurtures traditions, even as it allows disruptions and divergences that would eventually turn into traditions in their own right.



Balraj Sahni, Nirupa Roy (actors) and Bimal Roy (director) present their film Garam Coat *at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 26 February 1955*



Inauguration of the East-West Theatre seminar, Sombhu Mitra, Rosamond Gilder, the President Radhakrishnan, B.V. Keskar, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, 24 October 1966

11 April 2015

NARRATIVE OF A POPULAR SAINT

Shekhar Sen and his Rendition of Soordas

The stage in the Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium was set for the performance, comprising five low platforms and rostrums. At the back was a white structure to project visuals on, but it could also be interpreted as a pedestal of the icon, in this case, Krishna. Its top appeared as a temple dome but was not depicted realistically, perhaps meant to be a representation of the new temple architecture of medieval India, when nondescript structures were deliberately used to escape the iconoclastic denigration of the Lodi rulers (1451–1526). For it was in the medieval age (late fifteenth century) that the saint-poet Soordas lived.

Shekhar Sen is a theatre director, singer, music composer, lyricist and actor. Trained in music by his parents, Arun Kumar Sen and Anita Sen, founder members of the music department at Khairagarh University in central India, Sen specializes in musical theatre. In a personal conversation, he talked of his growing-up years in Raipur, how day-to-day life overflowed with music and performances. From a very young age, he composed, performed and created theatrical presentations with his friends. He has created performances centred on medieval poets, such as Tulsidas, Kabir and Soordas as well as the political philosopher Swami Vivekananda. He has also written Sahab, *a play on the father–son relationship. He was appointed chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi in 2015.*





The religio-social culture of medieval India was based on a notion of alternative spaces to the earlier grand styles of temples. To survive, new clandestine spaces had to be created by the local communities for religious practices and these became the site of the bhakti movement. Virtual images of Lord Krishna projected in the performance on the white structure were an apt representation of what the bhakti saints believed in—that the worship of God did not need to be confined to temples or iconic edifices because personal gods and goddesses reside in the hearts of believers and are thus indestructible. In its own way it creates a new conceptualization that the Almighty can enter the follower or the common man's body and become one with him. The story of Soordas does exactly that. A significant Saguna Bhakti poet, Soordas lived and performed 600 years ago in north India.

Shekhar Sen creates his solo performance pieces around bhakti saints and saint lore. The reason he says is:

'This is an important historical period in terms of cultural expressions. To resist invasions, music and the bhakti culture became a critical voice of the people and to me that is the ideal way to counter-attack. The word 'arajakata' *(anarchy or disorder) in our terminology does not mean mayhem but freedom to express our own position and stand.'*[1]

Soordas was born blind and because of his condition, was subjected to ridicule and torture at the hands of his brothers and rowdy village boys. The domestic space, though safe, could not contain his desire to experience and traverse the world. One day, when his mother gave him an idol of Lord Krishna, he suddenly felt one with the deity and embraced it as his *sakha* or companion to embark on the journey, which comprised the performance narrative. Sen narrated the childhood stories intercepted with short enactments and conversations between Soordas and his mother.

The main focus of the play was on the journey and the socio-cultural scenario which Soordas experienced, while Sen as both the actor and narrator interwove the personal with the social experience. Social hierarchies during the bhakti movement appeared to collapse. The



poor, the common men and women, began claiming the presence of God within themselves, their musical compositions revolutionizing culture and challenging hegemony and power structures. The personal journey of Soordas gives a picture of such a socio-cultural landscape. In the sequence presented by Shekhar Sen, one day, Soordas leaves home and goes in search of Brajabhumi\Vrindavan, the land of his beloved Krishna, where the pastoral tranquillity of life engulfs him. The generosity extended to him by the common man allows him to survive. The bhakti network created this sort of larger community and in the performance, we could feel the space around Soordas ever expanding as the artiste depicted him following the Yamuna river to where the confluence of the three sacred rivers—the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati—occurs at Prayag, Allahabad. Friends, fellow travellers and the common folk opened their homes to the blind poet and created a friendly and welcoming landscape for him to weave his songs. His devotion and the power of music won him admirers, followers and friends and the community bonds strengthened. Sen's narrative and enactment in detail depicted this phenomenon.

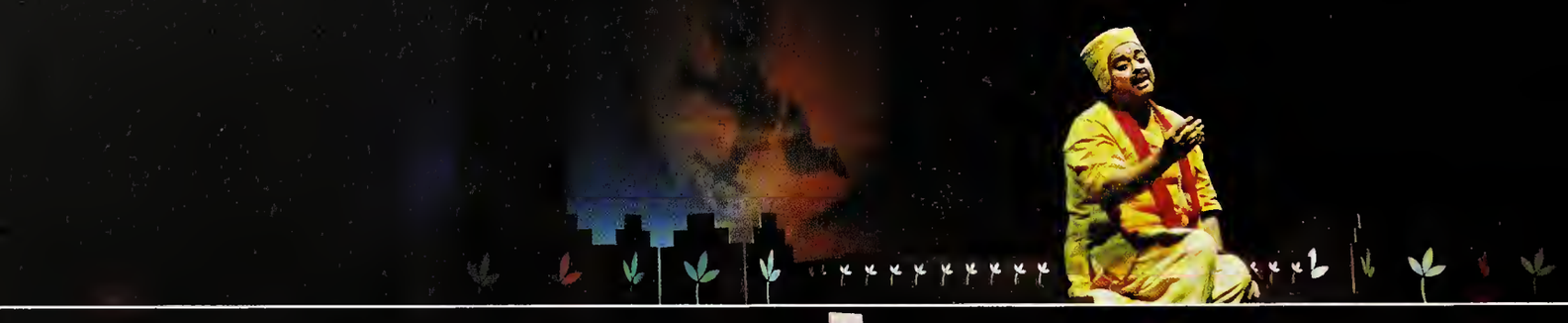
To a blind seer, one space from another is not distinguished by sight, but the cool air of the river or other sensual responses evoked by nature and its elements. This contributes to an understanding of the historical significance of how such sites were being formed alongside the labouring population who were becoming part of the new popular religious communities. The symbolic, simplistic stage setting allowed the audience a flexibility with the scenographic designs of the performance which continued with a narrative style of descriptions and acting out key scenes. As a result, the audience heard a story from a good storyteller (Sen) while also entering scenes where dialogues created a theatre experience.

Sen says,

'When I trace the travel pathways of Soordas, I actually map out his journey and where he would travel and where would he stop. If he is passing through Agra which was 15 kilometres away from the Lodis' and later Mughal emperor Akbar's capital, my aim would be to capture the entire socio-cultural milieu.'[2]

♫

YASHODA SWINGS HARI IN THE CRADLE
SHE COAXES, SHE CUDDLES & SINGS A
LULLABY,



♫

"SRI KRISHNAM SHARANAM MAMA"
I SURRENDER TOTALLY TO LORD
KRISHNA.



The journey then took the poet to the more established pilgrimage sites of bhakti culture. Shekhar Sen tells us of Soordas's journey to Radha's birthplace at Ravalgaon and other sites in north India. On his journey, he was always provided with a modest abode and welcomed by singing performers living in close-knit communities. This inclusive space was not only for the *bhakt*s or narrow sectarian fellows, but a more inclusive and egalitarian expanse.

The narrative then went on to the last phase of Soordas's life, when he settled down in Parasouli, the space dedicated to Krishna. A long life of 105 years is seen as a life of virtue so on his final birthday, the Goswamis, the local saints and theologians, organized a bhajan congregation of all the *bhakt*s in the dwelling at Parasouli. Sen narrated the last sequence giving his audience snatches of the songs that were sung as life seeped out of the legendary saint/singer. The stage lights were dimmed to create a green circular space and the image of Lord Krishna with a halo emerged on the pedestal/rostrum, juxtaposed on the head of Soordas, whose final passing away was played out by Sen. The performance ended gently with this image.

The performance was in the narrative style with the actor–performer narrating the stories, vocalizing the songs and enacting the dialogue. Shekhar Sen used different voices—to highlight the masculinity of powerful men, his words were tinged with authority; for teachers and saints, he used a deep but sonorous voice; while the natural Soordas voice was also the voice of the narrator, a softer modulation to a normal voice. A humble, modest articulation with a slow-paced clarity often takes on feminine undertones associated with bhakti performance modes and Sen performed it to perfection.

The narrative style assumed different meanings and overtones with the singing demonstrating Shekhar Sen's proficiency in music. He moved smoothly from dialogue and the spoken word into singing very intricate ragas. In the entire scope of the performance he sang a wide range of ragas—Bhimpalasi, Jaunpuri, Malgunji, Bilawal, Charukeshi, Kalawati and Hameer. He moved from khayal compositions into bhajans (devotional songs) and *bandish*, running through the vast Soordas repertoire into the compositions of the poet's contemporaries like saint-poets Meerabai, Tulsidas and Mukunda bhai, Rahman Khan's qawwali as well as compositions attributed to Baiju Bawra, court musician in medieval Gwalior in central India.



Richly layered with historical facts, acting and music texts juxtaposed with one another, Shekhar Sen's performance showed the intensive work that had gone into its creation. He talks of his performance process,

'I have a long working process where I do extensive research on the persona on which the narrative rests. I insist on "documentary evidence". I plot the narrative through music, and sounds such as those of fire and water.

'The research on the music and the ragas is also extensive for it is important to know and understand what ragas were sung in that era and the instruments that were used.

'I also spend a lot of time in understanding the body postures and gestures. I try to work out styles of enunciation and the language so that I can construct the character as a whole within the socio-cultural milieu of its historical background. For example, I have used Hindi and Brajbhasha for Soordas, but Hindi and Bhojpuri for Kabir.

'Acting comes out of the state of mind and characterization which I create and I let my natural instincts guide me. I try to be as natural and realistic as possible.

A secular–historical space is created even when the larger thematic backdrop is associated with bhakti, a religious cult of Hindu worship. What emerges is the story of the common man in the more syncretic space of a philosophical vision where no one can be excluded because of their religious identities. There was a point in Sen's performance, where Soordas was referred to as an iconic figure with whom all the blind and deformed men of society identify. Unable to do physical labour to survive on his own, it was music and his talent that gave him solace. On the other hand, he was the seer who remained outside, on the periphery of the economy of the labouring masses. He had the leisure to bear the fruits of others' labour to pursue his music and singing and in Sen's performance what emerges is a narrative of humanism and a larger vision of a collective which lies at the intersection of personal stories and the stories of a community.

Credits

Producer: Shilpkaar
Art director: Pathikrit Mukherjee
Light director: Pankaj Mang
Sound engineer: Ashok Pawar
Music track operator: Ajay Pingle
Backstage: Nitesh Shukla
Production executive: Nataraj Mishra
Assistant production executive/
backstage: Dayanand Mali

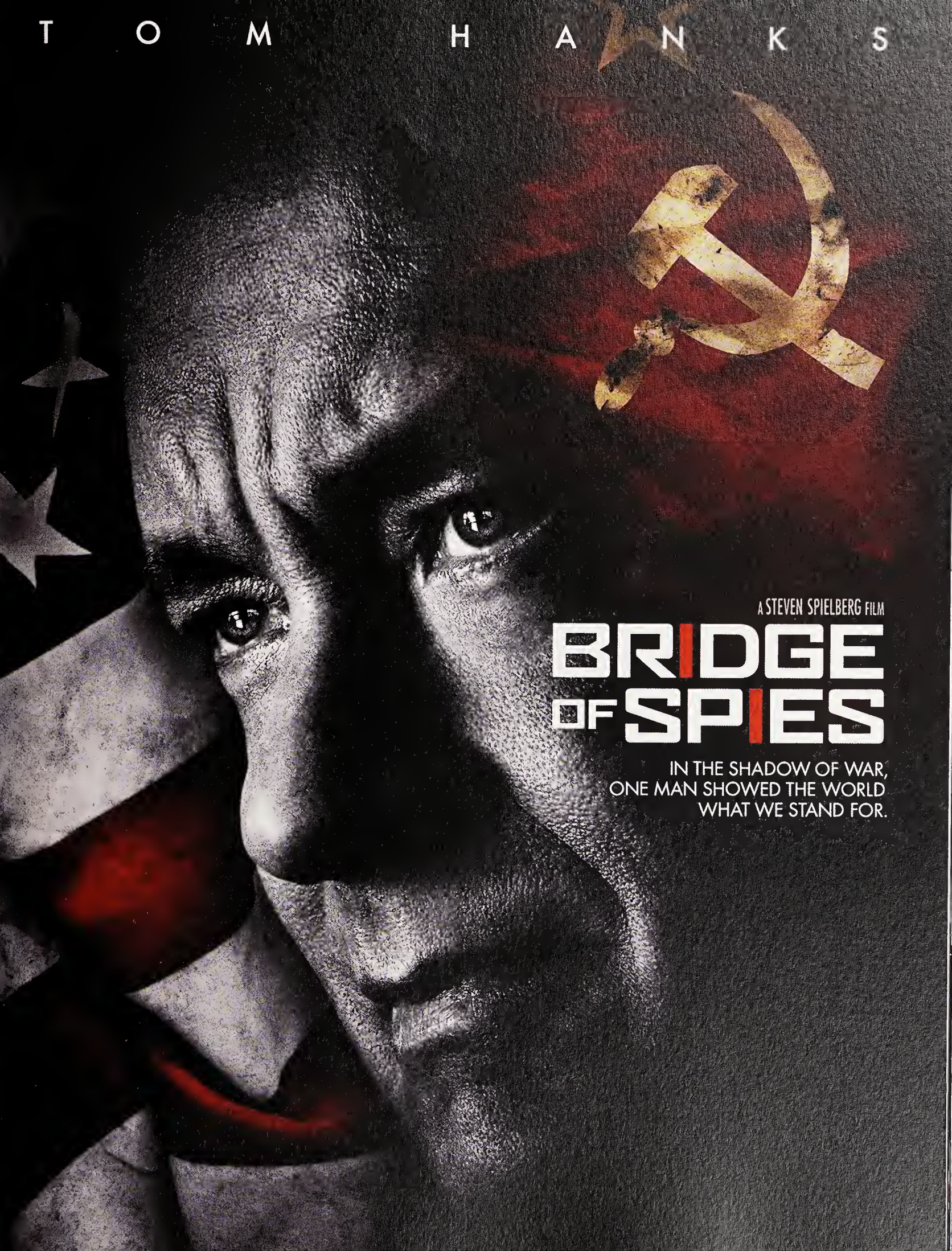


11 February 2016

LOOKING BACK AT THE COLD WAR

Bridge of Spies

Film screening in the Indra Dhanush series though an occasional event, is significant in order to represent a wide range of cultural practices. The thriller *Bridge of Spies* directed by Steven Spielberg was one of the films screened in the Indra Dhanush II series. With his hallmark handiwork, an eye for detail and idiosyncratic character development, Steven Spielberg strings a real-life Cold War, spy-swap historical drama. The historical context is the Cold War from the 1940s to 1990, when a fracas of contrary, distinct beliefs and ideology held with almost religious conviction—capitalism (USA) versus communism (Soviet Union)—formed the basis of an international power struggle with both sides vying for dominance and exploiting every opportunity for expansion. During the Cold War, both sides were keen to gather key critical political and military intelligence, and gain access to knowledge of each other's weapon strength. For this purpose, they deployed spies to carry out the required espionage.


TOM HANKS
A STEVEN SPIELBERG FILM
BRIDGE OF SPIES
IN THE SHADOW OF WAR,
ONE MAN SHOWED THE WORLD
WHAT WE STAND FOR.

Written by Matt Charman and Ethan Coen and starring Tom Hanks, Mark Rylance and Alan Alda, the movie's most captivating lineaments, which account for its success, are its direction, screenplay, acting and background score. The film received six Academy Award nominations including Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay, and won Best Supporting Actor for Mark Rylance. The movie begins and ends with a twin narrative strategy—there are no dialogues for the first six and the last six minutes of the film. It begins with a thrilling chase and it is the sound of the New York City subway and commuters' chatter that heightens the perplexity of the audience, who wonder what is happening. The FBI arrests Rudolf Abel, a Russian spy, played by Rylance. The Federal Court puts the decision of who would defend Abel in the hands of the Brooklyn Bar Association, which in turn selects Brooklyn insurance lawyer James Donovan—played with panache by Tom Hanks. The movie draws from Donovan's book *Strangers on a Bridge* and therefore, appeals to the viewer's subjectivities with its affiliation to the insider's account of the whole conundrum. Donovan did believe that everyone deserves a defence, saying, 'Our principles are engraved in the history and the law of this land. If the free world is not faithful to its own moral code, there remains no society for which others may hunger.' He works earnestly for Abel's acquittal, identifying procedural flaws in the government's case, which are ignored by the judge. He comes under increasing pressure from his family, firm and the public who are all incensed with a questionable sense of nationalism. One of the operative scenes dramatizing this contradiction is the juxtapositioning of the courtroom scene with takes of American children in school pledging to serve their nation and being indoctrinated with anti-communist agendas.

Donovan urges the judge not to consider the death penalty for his client, as he could serve as 'insurance' if a US spy is captured. This is exactly what happens and Donovan negotiates a tricky exchange of his client with Francis Gary Powers, a pilot who goes on a Lockheed U-2 sortie over the Soviet Union, where he is shot down, captured, convicted and subjected to interrogation. On his own initiative, Donovan rolls a third man into the trade, American doctoral candidate, Frederic Pryor, who was picked up and detained on the hostile side of the Berlin Wall.

The deal is two Americans, Powers and the forgotten Pryor, in exchange for Abel. Will the conscientious underdog be triumphant? *Bridge of Spies*, which takes its title from the Glienicke Bridge linking West Berlin with Potsdam, answers that question in the prisoner swap scene presented in a classic John le Carré style by the director. These were the strangers on a bridge where the exchange took place, men of the East and West, both representatives of two opposed worlds meeting in a moment of high drama. Even at the acme of the climax, the humanitarian and empathetic chemistry between the two main protagonists provide the audience with a warm feeling. For example, Donovan asks Abel yet again 'Aren't you worried?' and Abel's answer is deadpan: 'Would it help?' A frazzled but exuberant Donovan returns home as the news of his involvement in the release of Powers is reported on TV and watched by his family.

Foregrounding its main plot, the movie provides ample space to visual minutiae allegiant to the historical details. Donovan's disapproving wife, his crossing the Berlin Wall alone in the midst of the widespread inhumanity, violence, fear and pain, his negotiations and

tête-à-tête with Wolfgang Vogel, the lawyer who famously brokered spy swaps, and Ivan Schischkin of the Soviet embassy, his witnessing escapees being shot as they tried to scale the Berlin Wall, all of this makes the movie an imperative watch. Its apposite background score is a highly satisfying example of Thomas Newman's musical craftsmanship, adding the right amount of oomph to this extraordinary espionage thriller.



25 October 2015

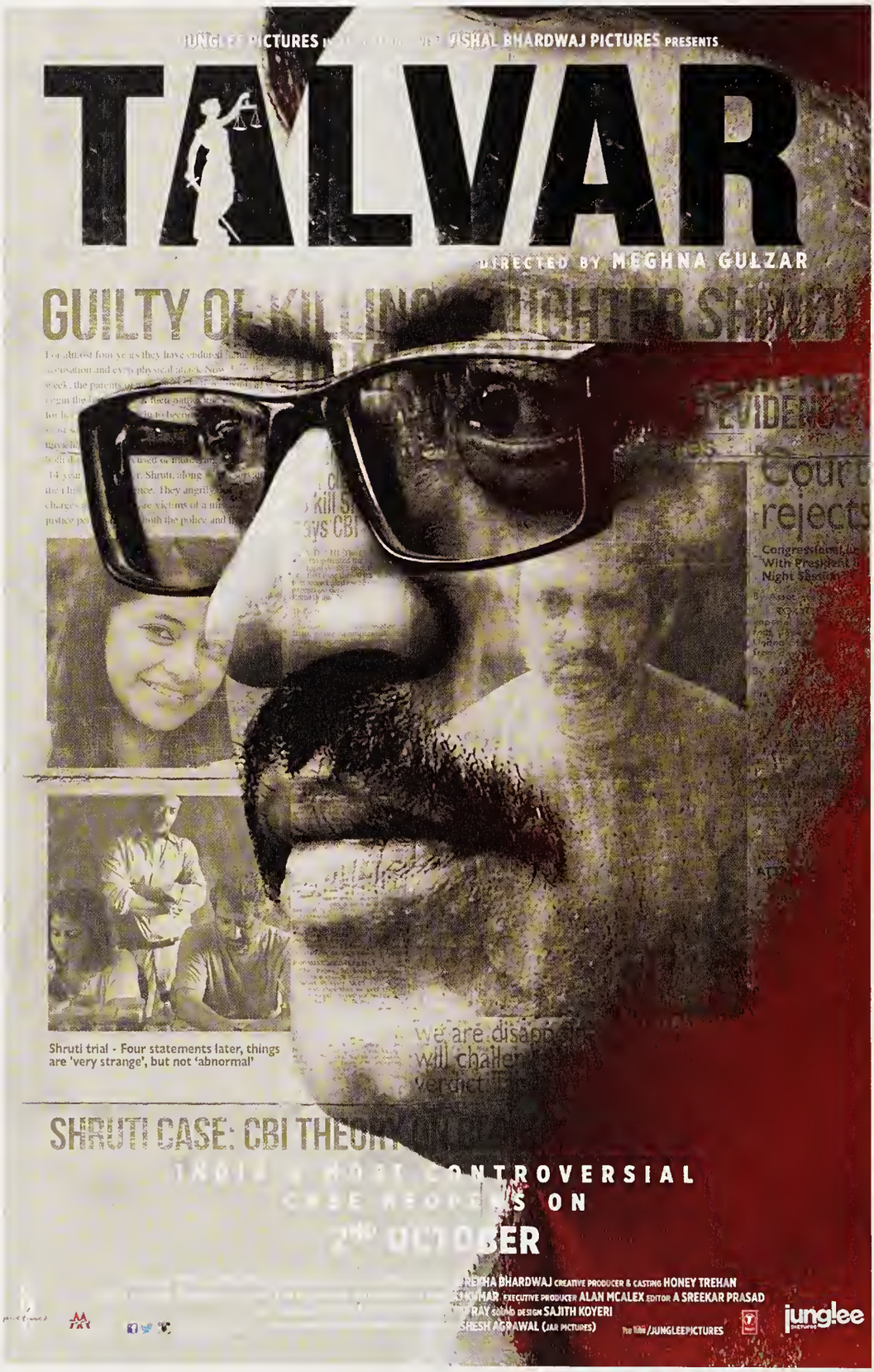
A MYSTERY THAT CONTINUES TO RAISE QUESTIONS

Talvar

Nothing tickles an audience's curiosity better than a well-directed whodunit movie production. Director Meghna Gulzar's 2015 murder mystery *Talvar* is one such example. The film is inspired by, and is a fictionalized and dramatized version, of true events. It crisply delineates the various anecdotes that were brought to the public ear by the media and the police investigation of the 2008 double murder case of Aarushi Talwar and Hemraj Banjade. The 14-year-old girl and her male domestic help's murder had stirred the nation and an inconclusive resolution of the case had left everyone in a state of unease.

Vishal Bhardwaj's writing and plot anatomy dexterously highlight the various contradictory accounts and provide a riveting look at the minutiae of the case details. In an attempt to present the script as unbiased as well as objective, the movie captures the constant ambiguity of the case, the different perspectives that it could be viewed through. The camerawork is fluid and the fast intercutting effective because of the film's back-and-forth storytelling style.


TALVAR
DIRECTED BY MEGHNA GULZAR
INDIA'S MOST CONTROVERSIAL
CASE REOPENS ON
2ND OCTOBER
PRODUCED BY VINEET JAIN & VISHAL BHARDWAJ CO PRODUCERS PRITI SHAHANI & REKHA BHARDWAJ
CREATIVE PRODUCER & CASTING HONEY TREHAN WRITTEN BY VISHAL BHARDWAJ LYRICS GULZAR MUSIC VISHAL BHARDWAJ DOP PANKAJ KUMAR
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ALAN MCALEX EDITOR A SREEKAR PRASAD PRODUCTION DESIGN SUBRATA CHAKRABORTY & AMIT RAY SOUND DESIGN SAJITH KOYERI
COSTUME ABHILASHA SHARMA LINE PRODUCER VISHESH AGRAWAL (JAR PICTURES)
/JUNGLEEPICTURES
YouTube /JUNGLEEPICTURES
RELEASE


VISHAL BHARDWAJ PICTURES PRESENTS
TALVAR
DIRECTED BY MEGHNA GULZAR
GUILTY OF
EVIDENCE
Court
rejects
Shruti trial - Four statements later, things are 'very strange', but not 'abnormal'
SHRUTI CASE: CBI THEORY
CONTROVERSIAL
S ON
BER
MEGHNA BHARDWAJ CREATIVE PRODUCER & CASTING HONEY TREHAN
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ALAN MCALEX EDITOR A SREEKAR PRASAD
SAJITH KOYERI
SHESH AGRAWAL (JAR PICTURES)
/JUNGLEEPICTURES
junglee

During the major part of the story, four strong persuasive characters guide us through the movie. Inspector Ashwin Kumar, played remarkably well by Irrfan Khan, shoulders the case. He is shown as a competent, sharp and conscientious investigative officer. He is given the best dialogues in the script and his acerbic wit completely rubbishes the first responders' report of the crime scene. He is assiduous in pointing out how the crime scene was compromised and the evidence contaminated. He scrupulously builds a case against the father's resentful assistant and believes the parents to be innocent. His second in command is Inspector Vedant (Soham Shah), with whom he conducts a constant banter infused with light humour and irony. They both work in close collusion until Vedant turns towards the more profitable side, belittling Ashwin's investigation. The victim's parents Ramesh and Nutan Tandon, played by Neeraj Kabi and Konkana Sen, leave the audience looking for signs of guilt or a complete breakdown. Their facial expressions reek of polysemy and dubiety. The mother's too-stunned-for-tears face moves the viewer to evaluate the parents as guilty, but on the other hand, the father's anguished cry subtly conveys complete innocence. What is striking about *Talvar*'s narrative construction is that throughout the story, the audience is witness to believable testimonies consolidating contrarian points of view. Dark and twisted police procedural gander, salacious rumours about sexual proclivities, the media making its own judgements as well as allegations, are all interspersed with the central characters recounting their own experiences and thoughts.

The audience is somewhat relieved and happy when Inspector Ashwin Kumar is about to conclude his investigation in favour of the parents, thinking that respectable middle class propriety would find its hold again and the blame on the servants would temper down the anguish a bit. However, just as we begin to get a bit comfortable, a rival investigative team is brought to the forefront and the various involved characters are shown providing alternative, self-serving and contradictory versions of the same incident again. This team heavily indicts the parents and is shown embroiled in administrative negligence and internal politics. The grand meeting between the two rival investigative teams deserves a special mention. The repartee between the two is acuminous and gripping, making the audience feel like onlookers of a ping-pong match, waiting to see who misses. Though the meeting does not lead to any closure or resolution, the court convicts the Tandons for murder and they are given life imprisonment as their punishment.

One of the strongest pillars that make this movie a compelling watch is its background score (Vishal Bhardwaj) and the cinematography (Pankaj Kumar). The bold decision to skip Hindi songs entirely pays off in spades. The eerie silence of the night, punctuated by the brief spells of violent, up-close-and-personal sound effects of the incessant sobs, doorbells, traffic, keeps us constantly on the edge of our seats. The orchestral, instrumental and choral pieces are timed to begin and end at specific points during the film in order to enhance the dramatic narrative and the emotional impact of the scenes. Similarly, a constant juxtaposition of dark and light in each frame in the movie produces the effect of everyday reality together with an ever-present menacing undertone.

Talvar is a captivating movie and is a must-watch for its brilliant performance, mature storytelling, admirable supporting cast, heart-touching music and visual mélange of the good and the not-so-good of our society, media, bureaucracy, police and the judiciary.





II DANCE AND CULTURAL EVENTS

17 October 2015

POPULAR CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS FROM THE REGIONS

Folk Dances and Music of Gujarat

The folk dances and music of Gujarat, with their vigour and mesmeric rhythm, capture an entire range of popular cultural traditions. Colourful, energetic and moving effortlessly from a slow to a fast tempo, as characteristic of popular culture, a variety of dance and music renderings transformed the Rashtrapati Bhavan's stage space. Whirling, dancing bodies of groups of dancers, moving around in circles as community dances entail, only take on occasional linear choreographic formations, keeping the audience in mind and it being a stage performance. The circular motion is perceived as democratic, an ever expanding, inclusive space where there are no lead dancers but a community of equals. There are no marked spaces for performers and the audience; there are no barriers to cross.

The performance started with a fifteenth-century bhakti song composed by the poet Narsinh Mehta. Groups of male performers kept the rhythm of the vocal piece with *manjira*s (cymbals), twenty hands going up and down together to the beat of the song by striking the cymbals in unison.



Gujarat is known for its lively *garba*, a vibrant folk dance performed in circles. Many and varied props are carried by the performers on their heads and hands, while they dance in circles or pairs. These props include small handmade shrines or structures symbolizing the abode of Goddess Amba, sticks, vessels or any household or domestic objects representing the day-to-day life and cultural expression of a community. Although presented as a formal stage performance, the formations and choreography remind one of local people dancing together to celebrate festivals and their community life which is rooted in day-to-day practices. The stage performance in Rashtrapati Bhavan, given its formal exhibitory space, of course, demanded more uniform and glamorous costumes reminiscent of the traditional bright and varied textiles of Gujarat that symbolize its regional identity. Colourful light beams fell onstage at various angles and enhanced the spectacle of the performance.

Various versions of the *garba* dominated the show, intercepted with a number of other popular cultural expressions representing the smaller communities. One such was the Dandiya Ras by the Mer community from Saurashtra, Porbander. A vigorous stick dance, exclusively performed by the male members of the community, it requires stamina and agility to jump and squat in almost every movement. The music was different from all other





forms in the one-hour performance and less elaborate. The dance started slowly and moved into a faster tempo at the end of the sequence.

The sequence was followed by a recital of the special 'double flute', known in the local language as *'jodiyo pavo'*, consisting of two pipes. The instrument and the musicians represent a nomadic community, the Jaths of Gujarat, who are followers of a local *pir* (saint) and part of a syncretic religious tradition.

The dances of the Dang tribe who live on the borders of Gujarat and Maharashtra was the next sequence. These three dances included gymnastic formations and resonated with the Lavani. Unlike other tribal performances, these dances are not part of any religious worship, but reflect their origin in agricultural cults. They take one back into the history of all folk consciousness and the local popular community celebrations to coincide with the agricultural cycles.

From this point, the repertoire went on to the Ras dance of Gujarat, which despite its agricultural celebratory roots is anchored in the Krishna cult. The Ras dances flowed into the final sequence where all the dancers of the various communities gathered together, performing their own movements and style but merging into a common space as is possible only in popular cultures. Though the dances are generally varied, the basic rhythm and



tempo can construct a choreography of diversity and allow the different groups to display their distinctness. Eclectic in character, the folk dances and songs of Gujarat manage to break the myth that even a regional or local identity is rarely manifested by any one style or can be coalesced into a homogenous performance style.

Gujarat has a number of such local performance troupes who perform both in the state and outside. At the Rashtrapati Bhavan performance, different ensembles represented the different dances, allowing for a larger participation with almost 125 performers coming together for the concert. The dances are carefully choreographed without losing their local flavours. In festival time in Gujarat, these groups also perform for the local people, starting off the community celebrations.

Often, such popular cultural expressions are seen as genres distinct from classical or the connoisseur art, but compelled to be accommodated within a larger Indian cultural representation. Yet the folklore tradition has always captured the struggle of its own time in a complex manner; its apparent naivete is an artistic device concealing intense moments of suffering in the life of the people it represents. Form and content are thoroughly integrated in folk performances and the simple and repetitive form reveals more than it conceals.







13 March 2016

EXPLORING UNCHARTED SEAS

Aditi Mangaldas' Search for the Intangibles

Stage and auditorium were plunged into darkness, except eight points of light—the lights were then gradually lowered to illuminate the faces of eight dancers. Rhythmic footwork of the Kathak dance form inaugurated the opening sequence as the lights came on. The other dancers exited, leaving the main performer, the Kathak danseuse Aditi Mangaldas, standing at centre stage. Mangaldas began her first solo piece with tempo and rhythm. While continuing with intricate footwork, she looked across the theatre as if in search of infinity. The commentary in the beginning told us, that the search could be 'the search of God, of truth, of transcendence, of the elusive or of self.'

Aditi Mangaldas was trained under her gurus, Kumudini Lakhia and Pandit Birju Maharaj, and made her debut at the age of 16 in the Kaal Kalakar festival for young performers in Mumbai. She has performed extensively in national and international festivals (1982: UK, 1985: USA and 1987: USSR) and performed at the Lincoln Centre at the age of 22. Her objective is to present her dance as a cosmopolitan cultural expression and not only as a cultural manifestation of an Indian identity.

Her classical performances blend classical techniques with traditional Kathak structures, and as she emphasizes, 'Not wearing a dupatta or a flimsy piece of cloth cannot determine if I am doing classical Kathak or not. I find the debate instigated by the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, 2012, problematic. Why I have discarded the dupatta and hence have no claim on the classical Kathak repertoire is ridiculous, ahistorical as women did not take to Kathak in an earlier time; it is, indeed, gender-insensitive.'[4]



Other dancers joined Mangaldas, dancing in different formations. An episode of intricate footwork by the dancers followed, the soundscape comprising music and rhythmic beats, together with the fast pace of the dance, thereby setting the tone of the performance.

Aditi Mangaldas, a leading Kathak dancer and choreographer, commented on her innovative compositions,

'I do not believe in archiving the classical Kathak form through my dance or facilitating merely a documentation. I want to embody its historical progress and the process of its evolution. You cannot be a purist of a classical dance while you are at the crossroads of a global cultural world.

My performance repertoire ranges from what I would redeem as classical-based performances ('Uncharted Seas') to the contemporary repertoire ('Within, Now is, Timeless'). My classical performances bring in classical techniques and traditional Kathak structures, the spine, footwork, and chakkars.'[1]

The entire performance and the sequences followed a similar fast pace and rhythm executed with perfect technique, the movements elegant, clear and precise. The pace of the rhythm continued till the main dancer on three occasions slid down to the floor in the famous Kathak gesture of *abhinaya* that expresses emotions, leading the audience towards experiencing the sentiment. The dancer broke out in poetry:

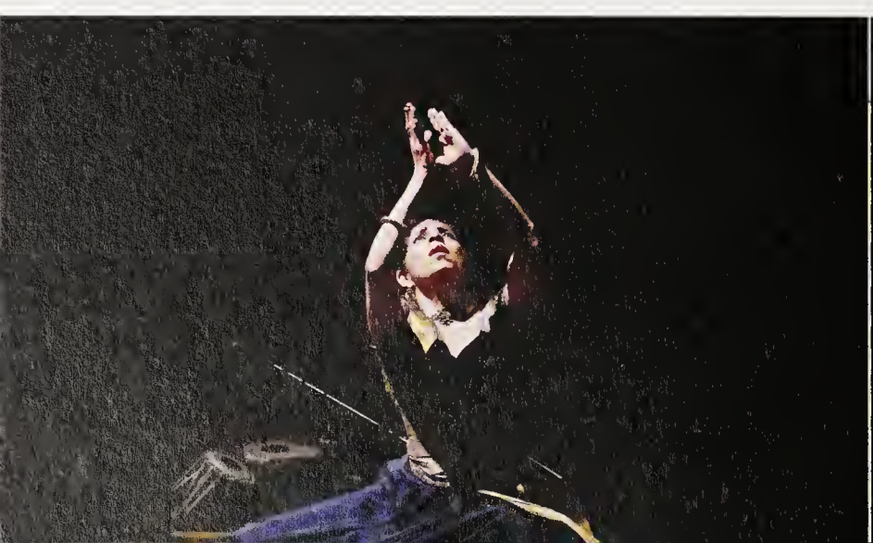
'I seek the beloved, his beautiful body shines like jewel...

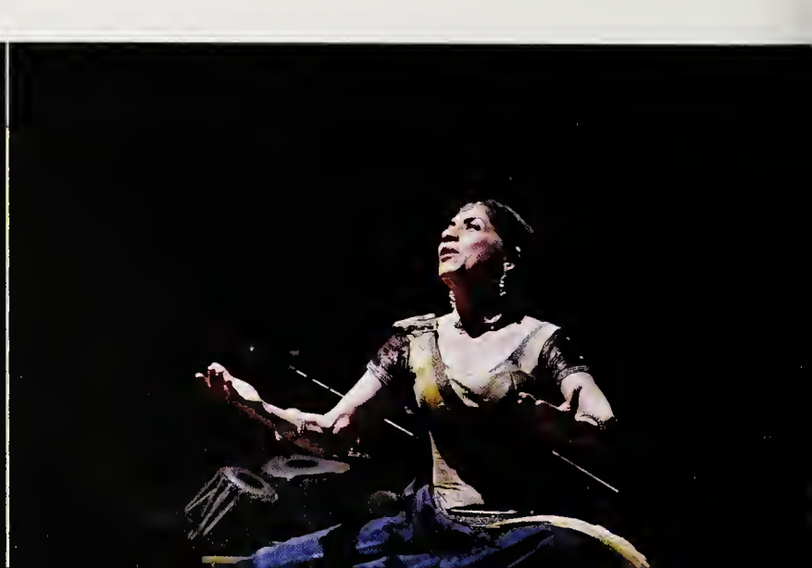
I seek I seek,

Is it a man? Is it a woman?

Is it truth? Is it freedom, energy, beauty and love?'

The poem acted and enacted in English, with gestures and voice embodying the emotion, was followed by a dance rendition of the poem sung by the vocalist who, together with the dancer, created soulful moments.







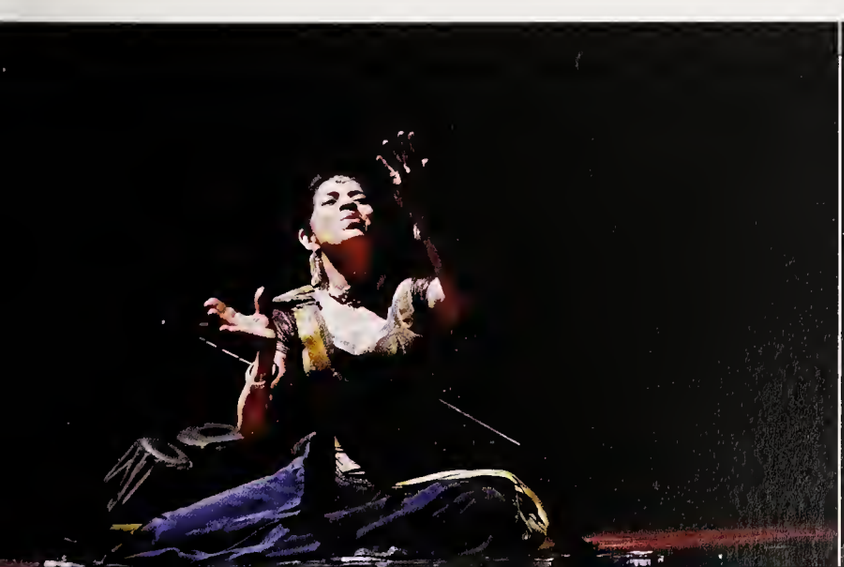
After the first round of poetry, the dancers performed the *chakradhar parans* over a considerable time duration. After a number of *chakkars*, without breaking the pace, Mangaldas ended one such *chakradhar* with a second, beautiful rendition of poetry:

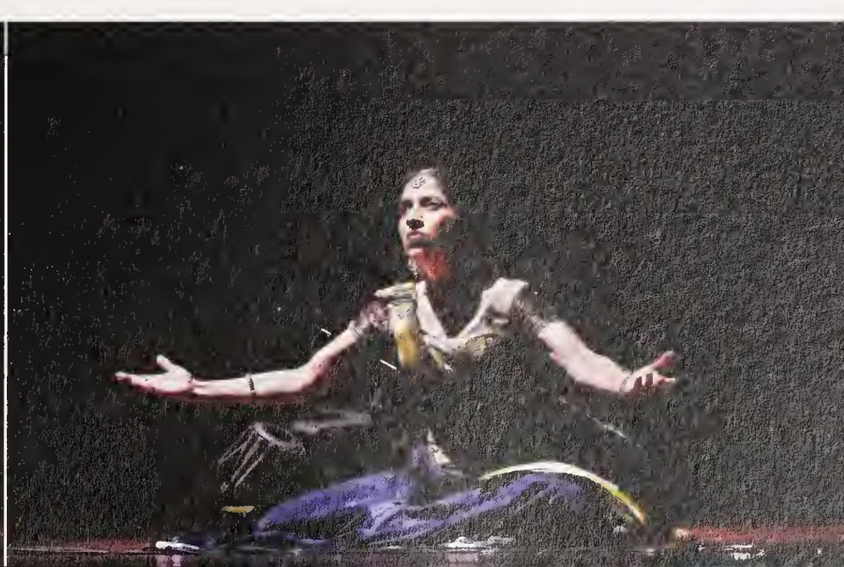
'Gently falling upon the gate of gently waking.

A story unleashed, is it within this that we seek....'

The poetry once again became the lyric of a soulful song with a dance rendition.

Mangaldas presented the first *tatkar*, a long piece of impeccable footwork, creating the rolling sound of waves. The ghungroos, the bells on her ankles, rung in a continuous vibration, indicating the flow from gentle to towering waves in quick succession. While her footwork resonated in the auditorium, the lights dimmed and a red pointed light fell on her feet till, slowly, the stage darkened.





The performance resumed with four dancers coming forward, silhouetted in a diagonal line. Other dancers, including Mangaldas, joined the four dancers on stage. They danced in various geometrical formations and at this point, *chakkar*s made a comeback with renewed vigour and energy. With enormous speed, technique and expertise, the dancers created intricate formations while circling in complete coordination. In the long ensuing episode, the dancers whirled in full speed and the vision of moving bodies evoked a visceral response, enthralling the audience.

The *chakkar*s in the true Kathak style ended with the *gat* and the final *abhinaya* where the last poem—a song of the moon, nature and deer—was recited with engaging expressions by Mangaldas. This time she was not alone on stage but was joined by two of her dancers behind the backdrop, which turned out to be a net glowing in a yellow light, their gestures making long shadows on the backdrop. She continued to dance on stage, the lights went off and the performance ended.

Aditi Mangaldas talked about how she conceptualized the aesthetically stimulating design of the performance,

'I adapt some of the scenographic aspects of Kathak's history as a symbolic marker: I try to translate the feel of the stone steps which are made even and polished by the footsteps of pilgrims or the walls of temples and other sites blackened by camphor or the idea of smell and memory which comes with agarvati *or incense and then use it aesthetically for the scenic designs.*

The lighting design opens up the infinity of the seascape but can also be turned inwards. This is followed by creating corridors out of light beams and darkness to open up pathways for the search.'[2]



Costumes changed from episode to episode—a plethora of colours, beautifully designed with gold mesh underneath the colours, giving it a brightness and shimmer. Sea green, the dominant colour scheme, was broken in a startling way with sudden interventions of gold, red, black and even pale orange, all against a backdrop of black and golden Chinese design.

This was the first classical dance performance of Indra Dhanush II, and the performance effortlessly enveloped the singular aesthetics of the space at the Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium.

On the soundscape, Aditi Mangaldas says,
'The music for 'Uncharted Seas', particularly the vocal compositions, were by Shubha Mudgal and Aneesh Pradhan and totally in Raga Bageshri.

The Meera bhajan is drenched in colour. It has feminist connotations for me and the performance. It is not the confession of a sanitized woman but someone who broke boundaries and did not hesitate to express her passion.'[3]

Dancers

Manoj Sanagra	Sanil Sisodia
Minhas	Anjana Keenari
Gauri Diwakar	Farhas Ahmed
Karan Gangani	Ashish Gangani.



2 April 2016

A MODERN INDIAN BALLET

Durga, Woman Born of the Fire of Consciousness

Indian ballets were an important genre of the new cultural projects in the first phase after Independence along with the classical dance construction, the ballets incorporating the classical dance idioms from various dance forms (Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Manipuri and Kathak) around narratives. Performances by the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra (SBKK) of such ballets, particularly *Durga*, are manifestations of that genre. In *Durga*, Kathak and Mayurbhanj Chhau were the two dance forms adopted.

Shobha Deepak Singh, inherited the institution of SBKK and responsibilities from her mother Sumitra Charat Ram, who initiated a new post-Independence Indian performance culture with her celebratory music concert on 15 August 1947 titled 'Freedom from Bonded Music'. Sumitra Charat Ram played an important role in obtaining the status of a classical dance form for Kathak and that was the form to which her institution was dedicated. Shobha Deepak Singh first started her professional journey with designing the costumes for Surdas, performed by SBKK (1976). Trained in theatre with renowned theatre director and drama teacher E. Alkazi's 'Living Theatre', she is also deeply involved with documentation, photography and converting aesthetics from the visual to the performing medium. Skilled in Mayurbhanj Chhau and the sarod herself, Shobha Deepak Singh has increasingly infused this dance style and instrument into the repertoire of the SBKK. During the current presidency, the SBKK artistes have performed five times at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and twice at the Indra Dhanush events.

Photos by Dinesh Khanna



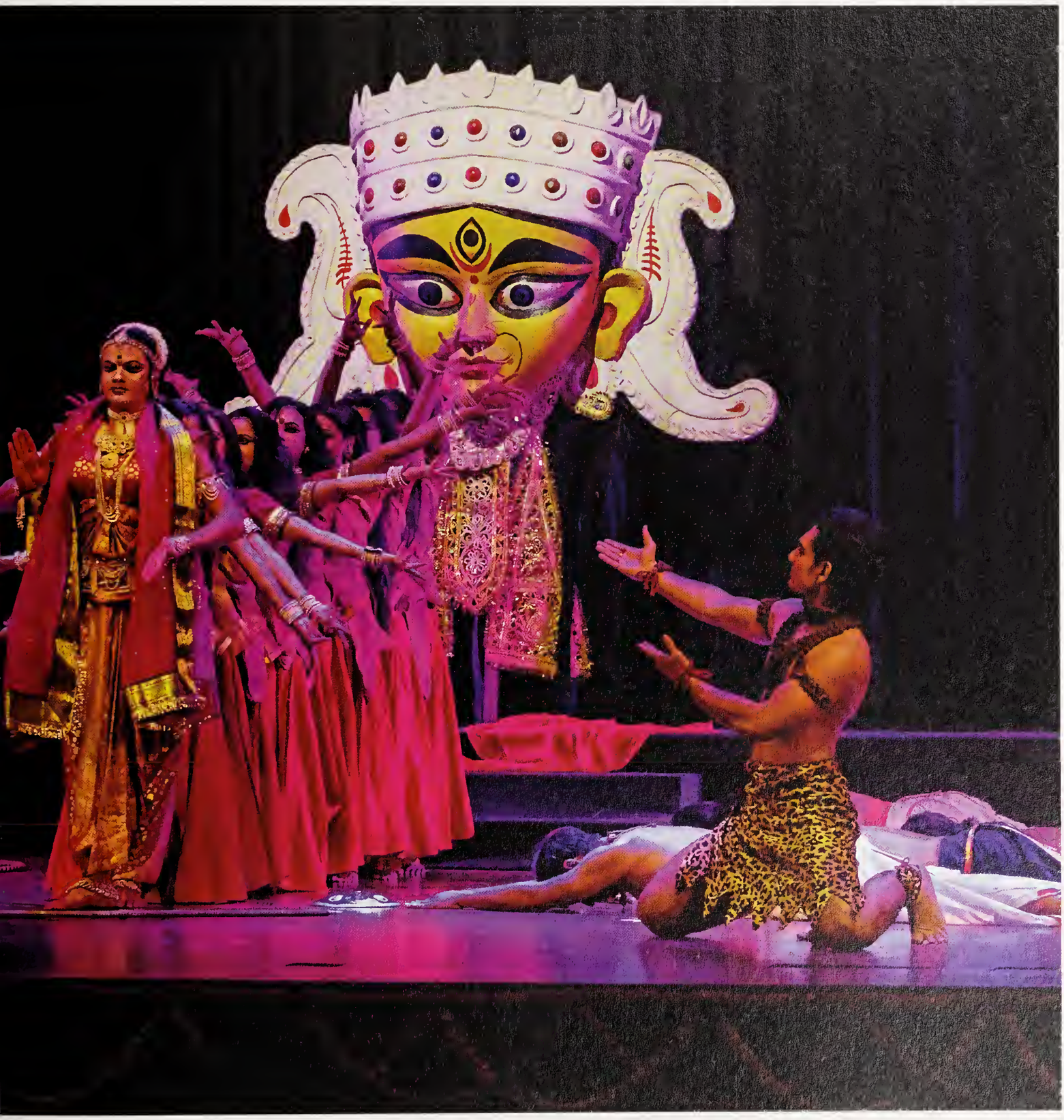
The narrative of Durga performed by the SBKK on the proscenium in Rashtrapati Bhavan's auditorium was a secular version of a mythological story. Durga is the myth of a powerful mother goddess, embodying the immense force or 'Shakti' of the archetypal female and includes both the incarnations of Goddesses Durga and Kali. The goddess uses her tremendous power not only to create life but to destroy evil.

The SBKK was founded in 1947 under the aegis of the industrial house of the Shriram Group and originally called 'Jhankar'; later when it was registered in 1952, the name was changed to Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra. The active engagement of industrial families in cultural practice was part of the post-Independence vision where cultural endeavours would be supported through institutions, often outside the State's infrastructure and bureaucracy.

The Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra presented its most famous ballet Ramlila *in 1957, choreographed by Narendra Sharma with music by Jyotirindra Moitra and Sushil Das Gupta. It has since staged more than 50 ballet/dance dramas.* Ramlila, *however, is performed as a significant annual event during the fortnight leading to the festival of Dusshera. Although the SBKK started with a focus on Kathak dance with all the major Kathak dancers of the time, such as Shambhu Maharaj, Birju Maharaj and Lacchu Maharaj, invited to teach and choreograph new compositions, the current director of the institution, Shobha Deepak Singh, who trained in Mayurbhanj Chhau for 22 years, has encouraged the Chhau to be the dance form used for new ballets.*

Choreographed, produced and directed by Shobha Deepak Singh, the head of the SBKK, *Durga* captures the essence of the Durga Puja celebrations of Bengal while narrating Durga's battle with Mahishasur in her incarnation as the fierce destroyer of evil. The story is that Brahma (the Creator in the Hindu trinity of gods), pleased with Mahishasur's devotion, grants him the boon of immortality. Powered by his immortality, Mahishasur unleashes disharmony and chaos on mankind. Women suffer atrocities while men are beaten up, harassed and chased. Very soon, Mahishasur collects an army of demons around him, posing an even greater threat. The goddess then has to evoke her powers from the elements of nature to battle the demons and mobilizes an army of females.





Shobha Deepak Singh says,
'The story of Durga is pertinent in contemporary society as Mahishasurs are still on a rampage ...I have tried to capture the struggle of women against male violence and issues such as female infanticide. It is not only Durga but her female army which fights against the menace.'[5]

The longest episode of the ballet ensued with alternate scenarios of Durga and Mahishasur confronting each other and engaging in dramatic choreographed battles. Sometimes it was a battle between the two protagonists, sometimes a choreography of their respective armies locked in combat. Energetic movements characterized this episode with Durga circling in vigorous Chhau movements around the stage to keep up the tempo which the battle had set. It was a swirl of bodies in frenzied movements, mesmerizing and enthralling the audience. Finally, in one swift movement Durga beheaded Mahishasura, the iconography of the slaying ending the scene. In the final pose of the scene, Durga took centre stage while the women in her army blended into one entity behind her, spreading their arms out to create the iconography of the powerful goddess with her many arms.

The second half comprised Kali's battle against the demon Raktabija. The dancer as Raktabija sprang into demonic action with his agile body and a grotesque mask. Kali, in swift athletic powerful movements, then went on a rampage herself to annihilate the demon population. In a fast-paced scene, Kali kills Raktabija and other demons, covering the stage and the battle sequences, Chhau's basic style and vigour providing the rhythm.

To restrain her growing thirst for blood, Shiva (the Destroyer in the Hindu trinity of deities and her consort), lay on the ground, waiting for her. Kali romped across the stage and stepped onto Shiva's inert body, her tongue protruding in remorse since she had touched him with her feet, a sign of disrespect. Then regaining her consciousness, her frenzy of destruction returned.

Both the victories over the negative forces of the universe are celebrated with a popular Bengali iconography of Durga, reminiscent of the modernist paintings of Jamini Roy in the Madhubani style, portraying her with a large head and child-like body proportions.

Shobha Deepak Singh talks of the performance-making process:
'The working process is long and is conceived over time. I ideate while we have scriptwriters who create the text and then it is put into music and dance choreographies are worked out. We do a production every year and our institution has hosted some of the biggest masters of dance and music in post-Independence India—we have the maximum number of Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardees amongst our alumni.'

















The choreography of *Durga* followed the storyline in a clear design without complicating either the dance or the narrative. Red, yellow and blue lights lit up the stage with five strong blue beams flashing out of the ceiling to create small circles of lights. Most of the boldly coloured costumes were predominantly red, adding to the visual drama.

The sound track was a blend of the rhythmic beating of drums, shlokas and sound effects to depict battles, destruction and festivities associated in the popular mind with Durga Puja celebrations. The robust movements of the dancers, particularly the female protagonist, contrasted emphatically with the gentler feminine gender codes usually associated with Indian dance and dance reconstruction projects which dominate Indian dance history—thereby enunciating the power of Shakti.

Credits	***Cast***
Ballet choreography: Raj Kumar Sharma	Durga: Shiburam Mohanta
Painting: Sanjay Bhattacharya	Kali: Molina Singh
Lighting: Milind Srivastava	Mahishasur: Swapan Mojumdar



25 June 2016

THE DYNAMIC GEOMETRY OF DANCE

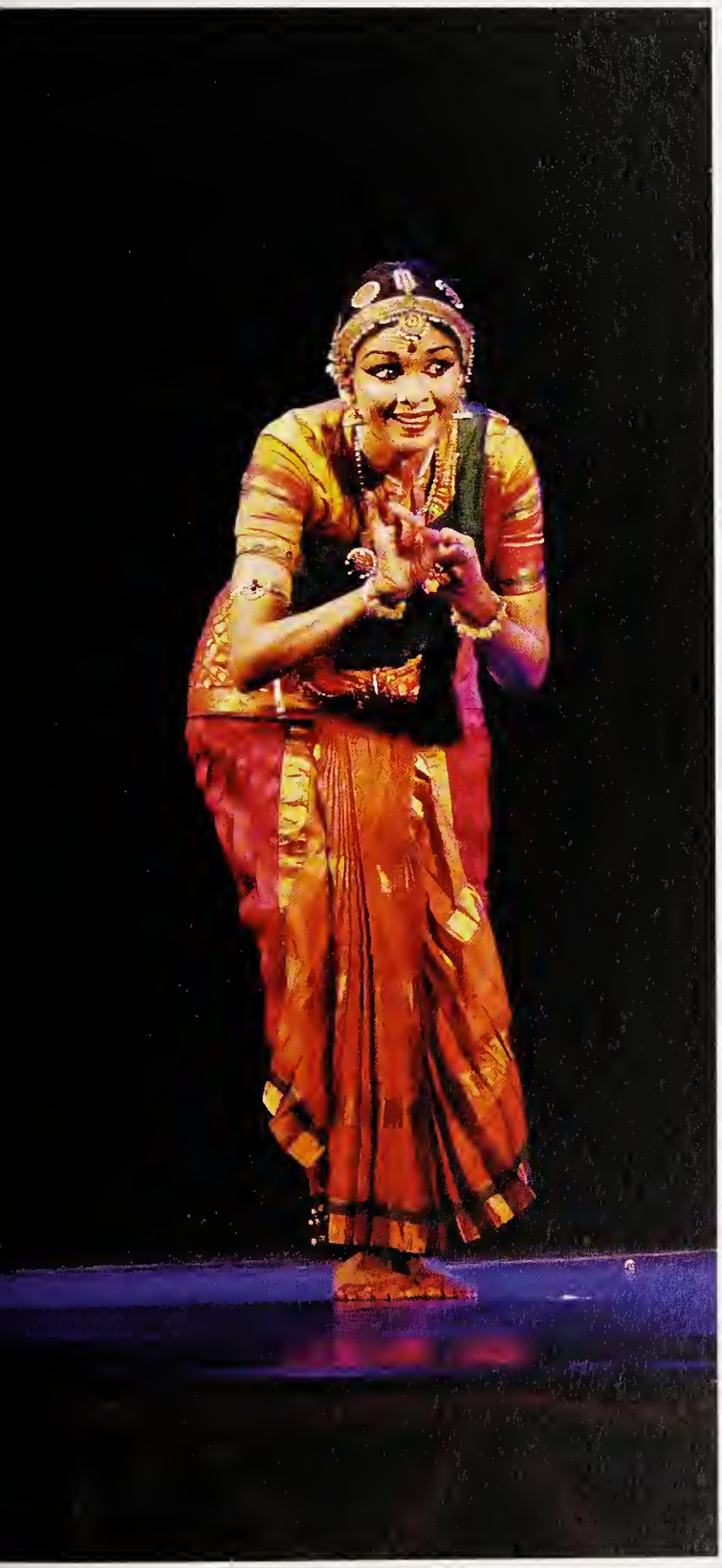
Priyadarsini Govind

One of the foremost exponents of the Bharatanatyam dance form today, Priyadarsini Govind breathes life into the precise geometry of the dance through her dazzling technique. At the same time, she excels in nuanced *abhinaya* through her subtle and eloquent expressions. Presenting a refined and varied repertoire, her performance was marked by poise, fluidity and intensity.

Priyadarsini Govind is an acclaimed Bharatanatyam dancer based in Chennai. She was initiated into dance at the age of six and was trained by the respected gurus, S.K. Rajarathnam Pillai and Kalanidhi Narayanan. She has performed extensively and received the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 2012. She was appointed the Director of the leading dance academy—Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai, in 2013.









Reflecting on her selection for the concert at the Rashtrapati Bhavan she said, 'Each performance is different and unique, it was a very special occasion and an honour to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. I wanted the repertoire to be pan-Indian and strike a chord with each person in the audience. Our country has such a treasure of mythological and cultural narratives, I wanted to present a part of this grand legacy as well as the beauty and depth of the Bharatanatyam form.'[6]

The opening piece interspersed intricate rhythmic patterns with verses from iconic texts of Tamil poetry. The *Alarippu* is one of the first items taught to Bharatanatyam students. Combining the head, eye and neck movements and extending them into *nritta* sequences, it forms the foundation for the Bharatanatyam technique. The artiste layered the *Alarippu* with poetic sub-texts and complex rhythm patterns, presenting the essence of the dance form through a rare and unique interpretation. Introducing novel elements within the traditional repertoire is a hallmark of the style Priyadarsini Govind has evolved over the years.



She attributes her explorations in dance to the influence of her gurus. Guru Kalanidhi Narayanan was known for her vast repertoire of *padam*s (musical compositions) and expertise in *abhinaya* while guru S.K. Rajarathnam Pillai was known for his command over technique and flair for choreography.

> *'I have experienced a lifetime of learning with both my gurus. They belonged to a generation where learning was a lifelong process. One learnt over many years through observation, osmosis and experience. Their commitment to art was identical since both believed that art was above all else and they devoted their life to their passion.'*[7]

Weaving together verses from ancient Sanskrit texts, the next composition revolved around the theme of the feminine energy—as the goddess, the mother, and the divinity that is part of every human being. A concept integral to aesthetics as well as to our daily lives, the dancer portrayed various shades of the feminine through the roles of Kali, Hemavati, Meenakshi and other avatars of Devi, Goddess Durga.

The bhajan, '*Thumaki chalat Ramchandra*', a popular composition by saint-poet Tulsidas, expressed the theme of deep maternal love. The performer switched roles effortlessly. In one moment she was the mischievous infant and in the next she transformed into the mother overwhelmed with emotion and affection.

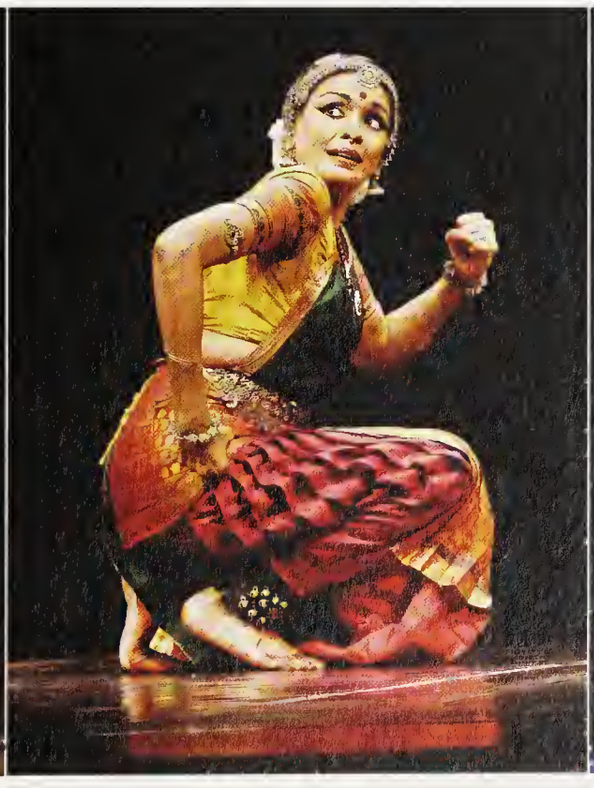
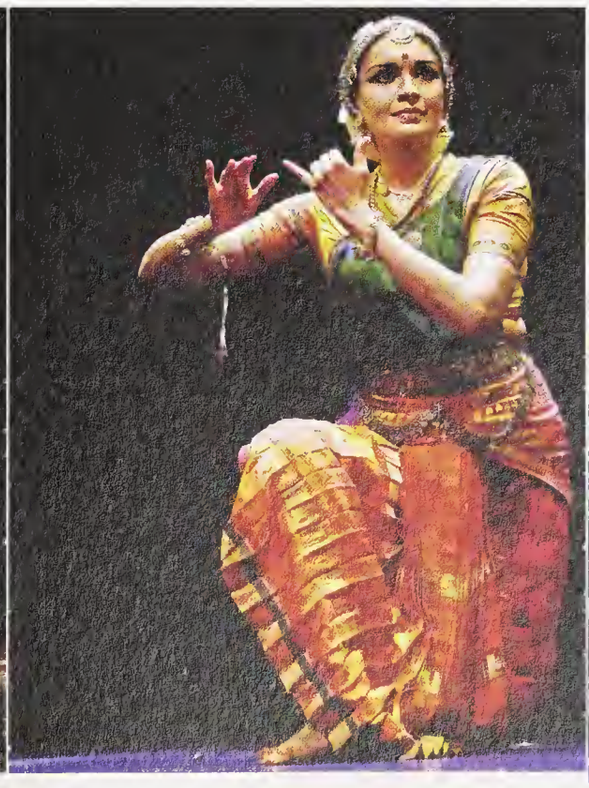
Observing and articulating the complex cross-sections of ordinary lives, another *padam* depicted a *nayika* (heroine) who faces the dilemma between her duty and her heart. Rich with emotive appeal, the theme reflected the trials and tribulations that resonate across women's lives—the choices they make, the dilemmas they face and often, the contradictory aspects of the life they lead. As an artiste, Priyadarsini Govind's trajectory has also gone through a number of turning points. The only classical dancer in a family of lawyers, Govind holds a college degree in commerce and a diploma in mass communication. She has always acknowledged the crucial role her mother, husband and children have played in encouraging her to plunge into the world of art and remain undaunted in her path as a dancer.

Since 2013, she has been the Director of one of the most prestigious dance institutes in the country, Kalakshetra Foundation. Sharing her vision and plans for the future of the institute she says,

> *'Kalakshetra is the pride of the country in terms of its historical and artistic legacy, the methodology of teaching, the body of work and the sheer number of students who have trained here through the years. It plays a pivotal role in dance education in the country; we train students in a variety of aspects of dance, interrelated arts and aesthetics. It also has a transformative role by permeating to different levels in our society and bringing about changes in the cultural landscape of our country. Students trained here choose to pursue many different roles as performers, teachers and cultural workers all over the world. The pedagogy of this institute has developed over many years and I seek to further strengthen it.'*[8]

Accompanying artistes

Nattuvangam: K.S. Balakrishnan
Vocals: Vasudha Ravi
Mridangam: Vedakrishna Ram
Violin: Eshwar Ramakrishnan

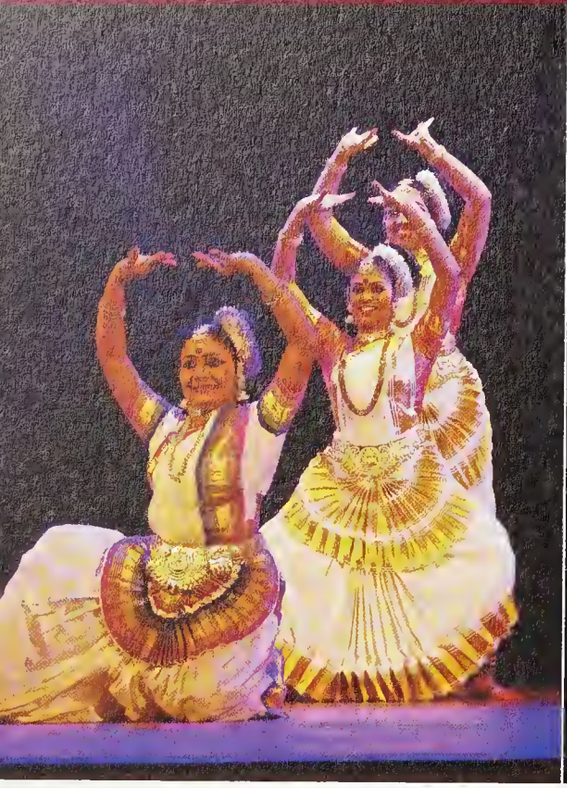
3 September 2016

CELEBRATIONS AND PERFORMANCE

Onam and Festivities

The celebration of Onam brought ten of Kerala's performing art forms to the Indra Dhanush on the inaugural day of the ten-day festivities. The performing arts of Kerala, extremely rich and varied, ranging from the classical to the local to performances in the domestic sphere, have always indicated the significance of regional cultures. The relation between regional and national cultures have often been seen as fraught with tension and anxiety or supplemental and complementary to each other. To bring them to the Indra Dhanush series at the Rashtrapati Bhavan was, therefore, a gesture from both sides—from the host, the President of India, and the government of Kerala who wanted to kick off their ten days of Onam, the biggest festival of Kerala (regarded as its state festival) with a cultural evening.







Onam is related to the myth of King Mahabali, who is said to have ruled Kerala in ancient times. His unfair exile from his kingdom was executed by Vishnu's avatar, Vamana, who was instigated by divinities jealous of the benevolent king's popularity. The story is that he pleaded that he be allowed to return to his kingdom to meet his subjects once a year and was permitted to do so. Onam celebrates his visit and every year people welcome him symbolically with elaborate rituals, songs, dances, feasts and many other cultural offerings. However, though the story refers to King Mahabali's good governance and rule, ancient festivals somehow seemed an occasion to create mayhem, to destroy social and political order and hierarchies and turn the world upside down.

Percussion beats, cymbals in unison with vocal music, opened the concert with the vadyamanjari. The vocal strains opened the sequence but faded out while the drummers took over. Five percussionists played on their three types of drums in rhythm with each other, sometimes together, sometimes in dialogue or conversation with each other and sometimes in a theatrical style of competition.

The two subsequent performances were dedicated to two classical dance forms of Kerala: Mohiniattam, which translates into 'the dance of the enchantress', performed by Dr Jayaprabha Menon and her troupe and Kathakali, by the Kerala Kalamandalam, a leading institution that conducts training in the classical arts of the state. Given the limited time allotted, both the classical pieces could only provide a glimpse of their repertoire. Dr Menon's solo beginning was a pure dance form followed by the dance of the ball game. The ball sometimes goes up and sometimes falls, which is why it is a metaphor of life. Through intricate choreography, young dancers and Dr Menon filled the stage, creating flowing but precise movements around the imaginary ball in the air, in hand and around the stage.

The Kathakali piece opened with the traditional thirassila/thirasseela, a rectangular cloth which initially covers and then reveals the performer, and was centred on the classical episode involving a dialogue between Krishna and Arjun on justification of wars. As a theatrical dance, the performers created—through their eyes, hand gestures and body movements—a conversation around war and peace.

As the Kathakali dancers exited from the stage, an enormous peacock entered. Mayoora Nritham, performed by T.M. Premnath, is literally a peacock dance and the performer on stilts is wedged in between the glorious, colossal peacock plumes and the neck and face of the



peacock. The iconography could be that of Kartikeya, the god of war, on his peacock but the dancer is also the peacock itself.

The following dance sequences were local and from the day-to-day life of Kerala, popular during Onam. Kerala Natanam, Margam Kali, Oppana and Thiruvathirakali were presented by the Regatta Cultural Society, an institution devoted to promoting the performing arts. Devoid of either the Sanskritized tradition or classicization, these were local celebratory expressions, steeped in energy, joy and collective performative modes. The latter three also cover the three major religions of Kerala: Margam Kali is a popular dance amongst the Christian community, Oppana is sung and danced at Muslim weddings while Thiruvathirakali, is a more women-oriented cultural expression but related to Hindu rituals. The theme of Onam and other festivals connect them together and all three forms related to each other. Dancing in circular motions, smiling and looking at each other, the dancers portrayed people coming together and women bonding in private spaces. Not only do they represent three forms or three communities but also a transformative moment where domestic spaces are not inhabited by demure, submissive women but robust dancing groups, creating a gendered space.

The two other performances comprised the martial art form, Kalaripayattu (led by Y.K.M. Kalari) and the ritual-healing performance of Theyyam (led by Narayana Peruvannan Sangham), bringing back the imposing male performers, enhanced by either the strong movements and geometrical choreography of Kalaripayattu or the costumed grotesque (toned down for the occasion) shamanic ritual priest/dancer presenting Theyyam. In harmony with the occasion and spirit of Onam, the theme for the Theyyam was an expression of 'Sadhbhavan', goodwill and bonhomie.

Cultural heritage is intricately connected to what one embraces as one's performance culture and performative identities. To present one's culture within a formal space of a stage may not be ideal but it created a vibrancy in the performers on the stage, enabling the enthusiastic audience of important dignitaries from Kerala, the local Malayali community and others, to interact in the celebration of this important secularized festival. It was an ideal interaction between the national and regional, not only in showcasing a different genre of performances, but through a festive spirit which is more inclusive. It was a reciprocity of communication between a festival event and performances around the occasion.









MUSIC III

THE PRESENT OF OUR PAST

Reflections on the Indra Dhanush Recordings

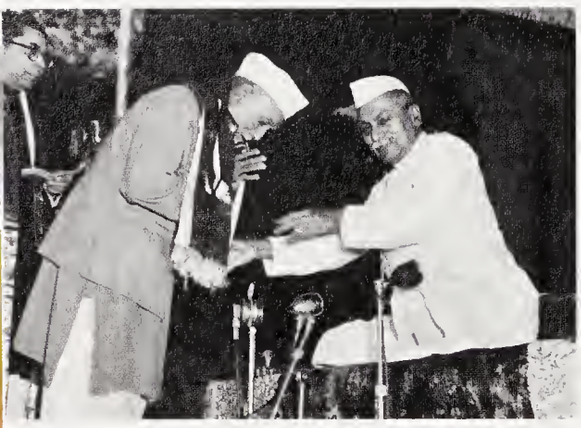
The Indra Dhanush concerts have been held at Rashtrapati Bhavan for a few years now. In recent times, with the encouragement of the Hon'able President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the concerts have become a monthly event and give an opportunity to artists—young and old—to present their art to a discerning audience. Some of India's greatest performers have had the opportunity to present cultural performances here: in all they give a vibrant and multifaceted display of the immensely rich cultural heritage of the country. There have been occasional guest performances as well: visiting artists from abroad have delighted audiences here with their talent. This is as it should be, for art proverbially knows no boundaries: particularly in a country like India, where artistic practices reflect the irretrievably composite and many-layered cultural inheritance that we have received and continue to work with. It is fitting, therefore, that the Indra Dhanush concerts should have featured a brilliant performance of Christmas carols by the Ao Naga Choir, a Carnatic vocal recital by Dr M. Balamuralikrishna, a performance of Sufi music by Shri Madan Gopal Singh and his associates, and a Hindustani classical recital by the centenarian Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan. This, one might say, is India.

Such cultural practices, and a thousand more kinds, exist across the length and breadth of the country: they are witnessed and loved by many people. The traditional media of music in India—song, dance and instrument—have all received a warm and receptive welcome at this series of concerts. What makes the Indra Dhanush concert series remarkable is that all these forms of art find a common platform for expression and appreciation, a fact that seems worthy of note, particularly at a time fraught with divisions among people and violence.

Two facts about cultural practices in India stand out for particular note. One is that culture permeates all other forms of activity, even in the most humdrum of urban settings, to the extent that we are hardly conscious of it. As has been often noted, in India song is everywhere: music from the radio accompanies us on public transport, songs from loudspeakers announce anything from political rallies to religious festivals, gaily dressed troupes of children sing their hearts out at school functions as much as at community health programmes. Wherever there are people, there is song. The other, obviously, is that the sheer variety of cultural practices in India makes it difficult in the normal course of our lives to know them all or even a fragment of them. Some, it is true, are brought into view by the public media; more recently, the Internet has provided a means of knowing more about the richness of our cultural heritage. The Indra Dhanush concerts have thus brought together a rich fare of performative styles and idioms. There have been more than 50 monthly concerts held since 2012. Each concert is carefully planned and curated, providing an insight into the style as a whole. It opens up for the interested listener a way of engaging with the style further: hopefully, it will create greater interest in individual forms of expression among those who have not had the opportunity of witnessing it before. With every fresh concert, the audience gets to know the country and the breadth of richness of its intangible wealth a little better.

What follows are a few reflections on the rich fare of Hindustani classical music that has been featured regularly at the Indra Dhanush concerts. One reason for doing so is certainly because the platform has been particularly receptive to this form of artistic expression. The series has hosted some of the senior-most and celebrated performers in the country but also relatively younger stars as well. Thus audiences at the Indra Dhanush concerts have been privileged to listen to, over the last two years or so, Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan and Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar, Begum Parveen Sultana and Pandit Jasraj, Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra and Pandit Chhannulal Mishra. Earlier Pandit Shivkumar Sharma, Pandit Hariprasad Chaurasiya, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and Ustad Shahid Parvez have also delighted the audiences. Nearly all of the major classical dance forms have also been featured here—but then one might remember that classical music has, since Independence, featured importantly in the image of the Indian State.

What would first come to mind perhaps would be the role played by All India Radio in the 1950s in acting as a disseminator of classical music. Veterans of the All India Radio remember the common perception that the radio under the then minister for information and broadcasting B.V. Keskar's leadership promoted classical music excessively: undoubtedly, there was a concerted attempt at many levels to incorporate the wealth of traditional music into the ceremonial of State. If there were some who thought Keskar's efforts excessive, there is little doubt that the great wealth of classical music would have not reached the common man had it not been for the role undertaken by All India Radio and later, Doordarshan. In some measure it has resulted in a democratization of forms of music that not so very long ago existed as a form of elite entertainment. Of course, the process started long ago: the decline of aristocratic patronage, the migration of hereditary musicians, the arrival of means of technological modernity and changes in audiences and spheres of production are





merely some of the ways in which traditional music negotiates the processes of modernity. The reason for choosing classical music is certainly not an attempt to suggest some kind of formal privilege, but to reflect on a style of music that reputedly has remained relatively untouched by colonial hegemony. This may well be true. But when we think of classical music today, on radio and television, or on concert stages and music tours, or indeed of music criticism in the public media and new styles of academic discourse, the relatively unchanging content of Hindustani music now exists in a condition of openness, of visibility, scrutiny and mass consumption. The emergence of a public space of consumption of music may have been fraught with problems, but it ensured that music did not disappear with the decline of the class that had hitherto supported it. A year after the Sangeet Natak Akademi was founded, the first President of Independent India, Dr Rajendra Prasad wrote: 'If music in this country has to flourish, this obvious gulf between the most developed music and popular tastes must be bridged. If necessary, the classical forms of music should be adapted to present-day needs and the common man educated to appreciate what is good in it.' [1]

The radio is only one part of a larger attempt to incorporate music into the self-image of the new State. There is a celebrated photograph of classical musicians in the company of Dr Rajendra Prasad, taken in the early 1950s. It records a reception held for classical musicians of the time and is set in an appropriately august setting. It expresses powerfully the place of classical music in the imagination of the new nation. The assembly of great talents inspires awe today. In the first row there are, appropriately, an older generation of artists: Allauddin Khan and Hafiz Ali, sarod; Omkarnath Thakur, Krishnarao Shankar Pandit and Anantamanohar Joshi, vocal; Mushtaq Husain and Nisar Husain, vocal, Govindrao Burhanpurkar, Ahmedjan Thirakwa and Kanthe Maharaj, percussion. Standing behind them in appropriate deference we have Keramatullah Khan, tabla; Radhikamohan Maitra, sarod; Ilyas Khan, sitar; Bismillah Khan, shehnai; Kishan Maharaj, tabla; Yusuf Ali, sitar; Ravi Shankar, sitar, Ali Akbar, sarod; Vilayat Khan, sitar, D.V. Paluskar, Vinayakrao Parwardhan and Narayanrao Vyas, not to mention other equally great musicians. Seated next to the president is the great Jaipur vocalist, Kesarbai Kerkar.

One response to this photograph, clearly, is of nostalgia and the sense of loss. All of these artists have passed away and those of us who had the privilege of listening to even

Top: Ustad Allauddin Khan receiving an award from President Rajendra Prasad at the ceremony organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi at Red Fort on 31 March 1954
Above: M.L. Vasanthakumari with President S. Radhakrishnan, 8 April 1966

some of them, live with memories of their genius. There is also the archive, a product of the age of mechanical reproduction, which enables us to revisit those moments of auditory delight. Yet deeper reflection might prompt us to re-assess the way that we view the past of classical music. The dazzling array of talent surrounding the symbol of the unified source of patronage, honour and reputation, is actually an attenuated one, marked by absence and death. Over the preceding two decades, so many of the greatest artists have passed away: Abdul Karim Khan of the Kirana gharana, Alladiya Khan of Jaipur and Faiyaz Khan of Agra.

Another aspect to reflect upon would be the uneasy memory of the rupture caused in the musical community by the Partition. Classical music, one might say, as well as those involved in it, performers and listeners, constantly look back to a past that seems greater, more noble, more replete with possibilities, than the present. And thus has it been, one finds, over the years: the anecdotal lore of Hindustani music is replete with evocations of the marvellous: of artists who could render kings and courtiers insensible, to make them cry at will, to change the elements, to break the shackles of elephants and bring them out into the street. At every point, when such stories are retold among artists and aficionados, there is the tacit awareness that all this is now gone, lost irretrievably. The past, whether located in the Mughal court, or in the Gunijankhana of Jaipur, the households of forgotten landowners in north India, or the stately image of great musicians surrounding the president, is suffused with this magic. What is most important for us to understand is not just the nostalgic reminiscences, which frame every iteration of the classical today, that rehearses this passage from the past: classical music today declares itself to be the present of precisely this past. It is this present that constitutes our musical environment, what gives us strength and sustenance. The Indra Dhanush concerts celebrate the present of Indian performative traditions, vocal, instrumental and dance-based. It is a witness to the resilience of our cultural practices.



12 December 2014

THE ART OF JUGALBANDI

Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra

The Banaras gharana duo—Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra—have mastered the art of vocal jugalbandi. Their musical dialogue extends beyond their music into their daily interaction as brothers, their pedagogy, *riyaaz* (practice) and appearance. Inseparable as they are, it is often difficult to think of them as two individuals since they have always been projected as a singular musical entity.

Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra are Hindustani classical vocalists, trained in the Banaras gharana. Born into a family of musicians, they learnt music from their father Pandit Hanuman Mishra and uncle Pandit Gopal Mishra. Pandit Rajan Mishra is also the disciple of Gyanacharya Pandit Bade Ramdasji. They have been honoured with the Padma Bhushan Award and Sangeet Natak Akademi Award. They have established 'Viraam', a gurukul situated in the outskirts of Dehradun, Uttarakhand, where they spend every summer training disciples.

INDRA DHANUSH

AN ODE TO INDIA'S TIMELESS CULTURAL HERITAGE

RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI



Reflecting on their musical technique of performing duets, Pandit Rajan Mishra says,

'To perform together, it is important to have a deep connection, share a rapport and to understand each other as persons and musicians. Whenever we perform, we take care that our singing should never be competitive. We are not envious or jealous of each other. We complement each other with our musical strengths and we appreciate each other's singing. This is the reason that we feel we have one musical soul, together.'[2]

On the occasion of the performance at Rashtrapati Bhavan in December 2014, they presented their signature style, devotional compositions of the Banaras gharana repertoire. As usual, dressed in identical clothes, they took their positions on the stage in beige kurtas with matching brown stoles. The elder one of the two brothers, Pandit Rajan Mishra carried the swarmandal.

Forgoing the alaap, they started with a brief invocation '*Narayan Hari Om*' that opened up into the *bada khayal* (the section of a khayal sung in slow tempo) in Raga Bhoopali, '*Pratham sur saadhe.*' Aptly timed for the evening concert, Bhoopali is a pentatonic melody of the Kalyan *thaat* (scale). Elaborating on the raga that easily lends itself to the devotional mood, the lyrics of the composition focused on the meditative and spiritual qualities of music. The artistes presented the facets of the raga through the reflective *aakar.* They hardly ever sung the same melodic phrase together, giving each other boundless space to explore and improvise, joining together seamlessly at the *sam* (the first beat of the rhythm cycle). Their understanding was so telepathic and deeply intuitive that one gave the cue to the other without even exchanging a glance.

Pandit Sajan Mishra, better known for his expansion in the upper notes, rested effortlessly in the lower octave in his rendition of the composition, powerfully projecting his voice. Pandit Rajan Mishra introduced each new *antara* of the composition before leading back to the lilting melody of the *sthayi.* While Pandit Rajan Mishra moved into the *sargam taans* (rapid series of notes), these were aptly matched by Pandit Sajan Mishra's *aakar taans.* Consequently, the composition flowed into the *chhota khayal* (section sung at a medium or fast pace) set to teentaal (rhythm cycle of 16 beats), '*Aadidev Mahadev.*' With clear enunciation they emoted deeply, a typical feature of their gharana that places a lot of emphasis on the lyrics and their meaning.

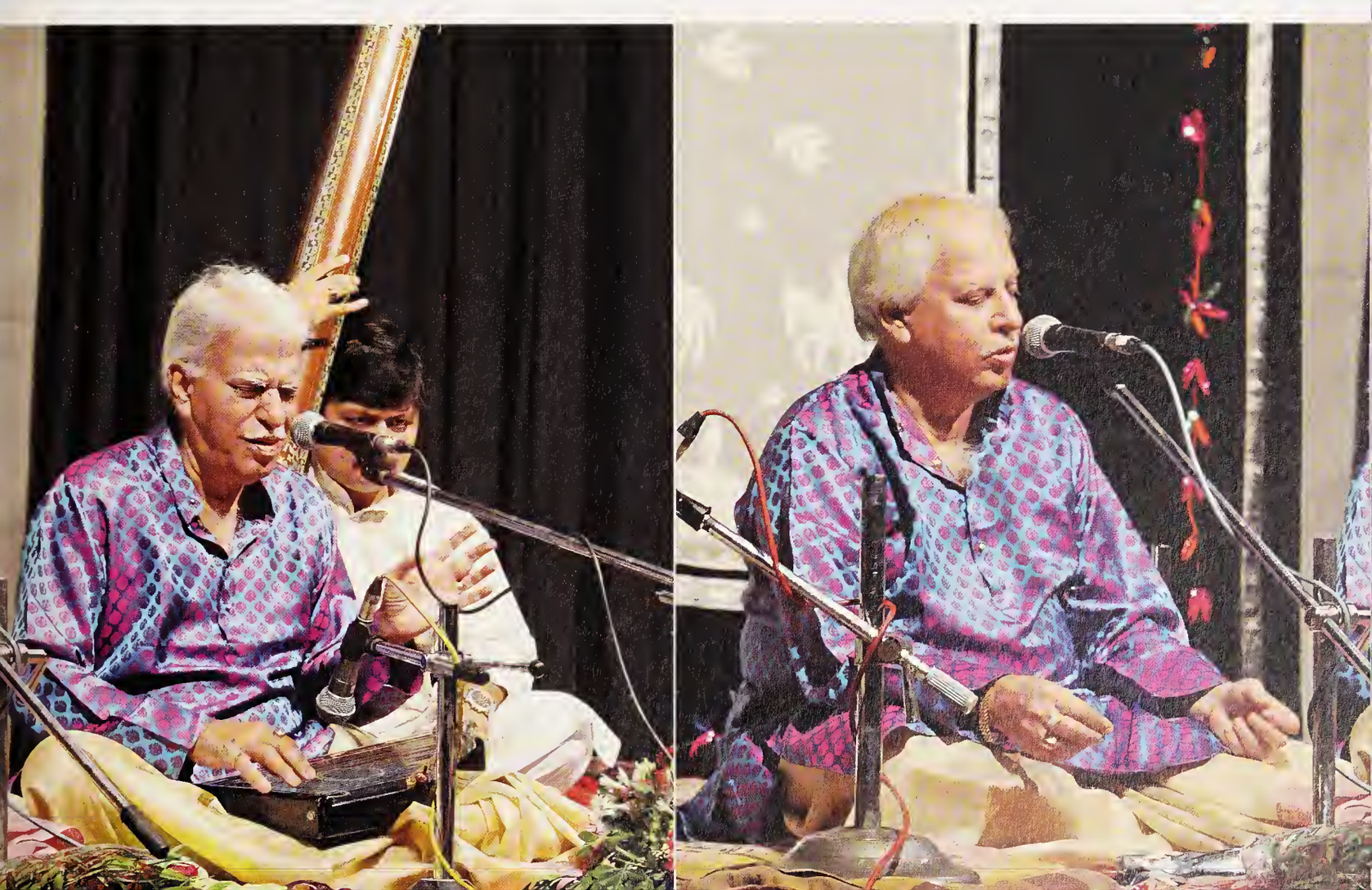
The maestros believe it is important to be true to their musical style, which originated in Banaras:

'Banaras is an ancient city with a rich cultural tradition. It has also been a centre for people from other gharanas to stay, practise and perform. As a result,

multidimensional vocal and instrumental styles developed in Banaras. In fact, Banaras is the only gharana where different forms of classical music like dhrupad, dhamar, tappa, tarana, khayal and thumri are part of the repertoire. We also give a lot of importance to pronunciation. Because of our emphasis on bhaav *or the emotional aspect of the composition, listeners enjoy our* khayal gayaki.'[3]

Hailing from a musical family that consists of many generations of vocalists, the brothers learnt music together in their childhood. Their parents and gurus were keen that they sing together. They started performing together in temples at an early age.

Recounting the days of their initiation into music and training, Pandit Sajan Mishra says,
'I was formally initiated into music when I was five. At that time, various functions were held in temples on various days of the week. For instance, on Monday there was a weekly cultural event at the Kashi Vishwanath temple and on Tuesday in





the Sankat Mochan temple. We started performing together on such occasions. Since then we have been performing together with the blessings of the elders, our gurus and God. The first major concert was in 1968 in the Sankat Mochan temple in Banaras, in front of 2,000–2,500 people. Even as children we had the confidence to perform in front of a huge audience because our guru had given us the mantra—be a student while listening, and while performing on stage, be a teacher.'

At the Rashtrapati Bhavan concert, the musicians presented one of the gems from their musical treasure of devotional compositions—the Bhagwati *stotram*, *'Jai bhagwati devi namovarde.'* A salutation to the goddess, the verse is known to have been composed by Sage Vyasa. In their presentation of the piece, the artistes alternated vocal vigour with gentle expression as they portrayed the various aspects of the divine, and the unwavering worship of the devotee.

The maestros are known for excelling in the genre of devotional music and their bhajans have been appreciated around the globe. They emphasize the emotive aspect of devotional compositions and compound their vocal excellence with a deep understanding of the literary aspects of the composition.

They say,
'We always choose to present the devotional genre as an important part of our repertoire. We can express the bhaav of the composition only when we have knowledge about the literary aspect of the bhajan. In fact, Banaras has always been a centre for literature also and that is why we strongly feel that literature and music are two sides of the same coin. Performance can touch the audience's heart only when these two aspects meld together.'[4]

The concert concluded with a rendition of the well-known bhajan, *'Vaishnav janto.'* While they improvised extensively on the words of the recurring *sthayi*, the *antara* was often sung by both the artistes together. As the rhythm gained momentum, the duo concluded softly in unison, in complete harmony with each other and their music.

Accompanying artistes
Tabla: Ustad Akram Khan
Harmonium: Pandit Dharam Nath Mishra

17 January 2015

THE MIRACLE OF MUSIC

Pandit Jasraj

A living legend, Pandit Jasraj is known for his sonorous voice, the miraculous powers of his music and for epitomizing the devotional energy of the Mewati gharana vocal style. Greeting the audience with folded hands and his signature salutation, 'Jai ho' as he entered the stage along with his disciples and accompanying musicians, he was met with warm applause from the audience.

Born on 28 January 1930, Pandit Jasraj was trained in music by his elder brother Pandit Maniram after the sudden demise of his father when he was four years old. For many years, he accompanied his vocalist brother as a tabla player. As a teenager, he was dismayed at the marginalization and disrespectful treatment meted out to most accompanying artistes, and vowed to excel as a vocalist. The untimely death of his elder brother left him without a guru, but he assumed the mantle of the Mewati gharana torchbearer. Later, he also received guidance and training from Maharaja Jaiwant Singh, his spiritual guru.

Pandit Jasraj is a renowned Hindustani classical vocalist of the Mewati gharana. Born into a family of musicians, he was initiated into music by his father Pandit Motiram. His guru was his elder brother Pandit Maniram. He has done extensive research on Haveli Sangeet, a form of Hindustani music, and created the unique technique of the musical duet called 'Jasrangi Jugalbandi'. He has been honoured with several accolades, including the Padma Vibhushan in 2000 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1997, among others.



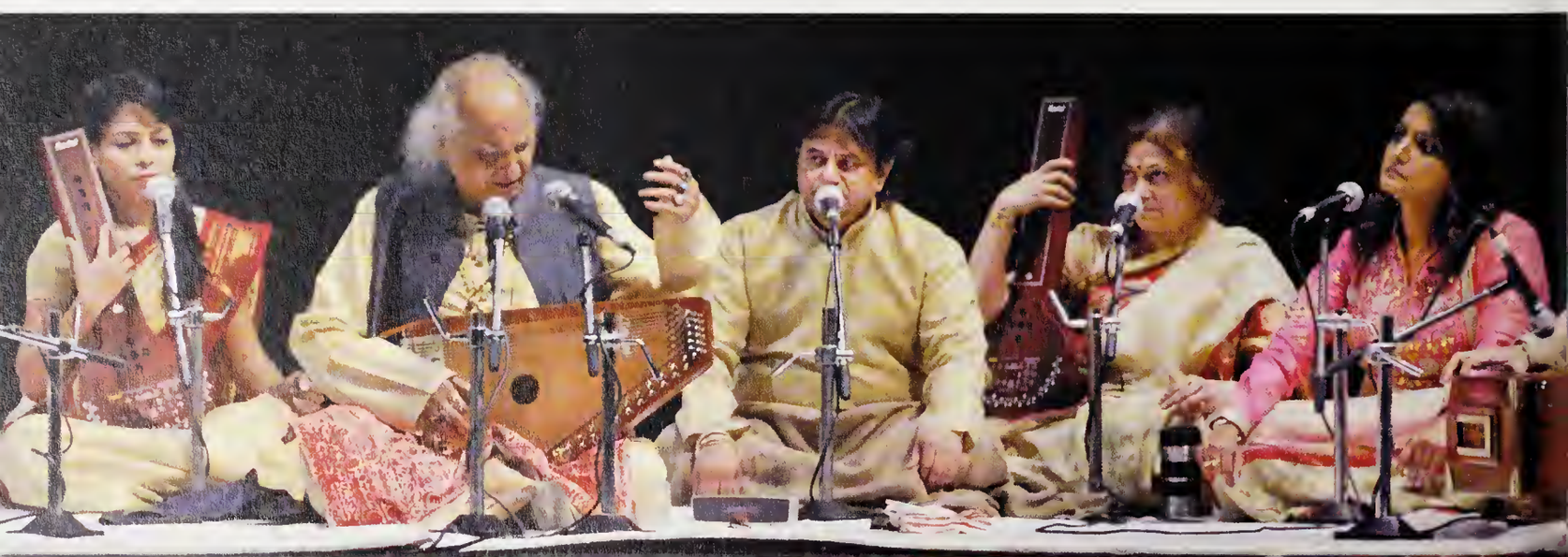
Spirituality and meditative aspects are emphasized in the music of the Mewati gharana. True to the style and tradition, Pandit Jasraj started the concert with the invocation, *'Om Shri Ananta Hari Narayan'*.

> *Reflecting on the nuances of his gharana, Pandit Jasraj says,*
> *'I belong to the Mewati gharana where we focus mainly on themes of bhakti, devotion to the Almighty, faith in powers greater than us, humans. Music is a path that connects us with the entire universe, with God. This is the reason that even in the technique of the gharana, we consider each note, each* swar, *special and sacred. The musical note is like an infant; it has to be treated gently, protectively, and nurtured. The* bandish *is approached in the same manner—raga elaboration is like bringing up a child, with care.'*[5]

With this characteristic tenderness that is an essential feature of the gharana, Pandit Jasraj rendered Raga Puriya. An early evening raga, Puriya belongs to the Marwa *thaat* and is a favourite with vocalists. Pandit Jasraj's vocal range complemented the meditative quality of the raga as it unfolded in the lower octaves. He also provided ample improvisatory space within the raga elaboration to his disciples and vocal accompanists, Rattan Mohan Sharma, Tripti Mukherjee and Ankita Joshi.

Another specialty of the Mewati style is the emphasis on a clear enunciation of the lyrics of the composition. The *chhota khayal, 'Shyam kunwar more ghar aaye'* exemplified this feature as the maestro rendered each line with varied shades of emotion and followed it up with cascading *bol taans*.

The gravity of the lower octave in Raga Puriya contrasted aesthetically with the following rendition in Raga Adana, which is primarily expanded in the upper octave. The devotional piece *'Mata kaalika'* set to Addha taal (rhythm of 16 beats), is a composition of Pandit Maniram and one of Pandit Jasraj's most popular *bandishes*. Dedicated to the various avatars



of Durga, the composition eulogizes her as the divine mother. With eyes closed, hands raised in devotion, Pandit Jasraj traversed effortlessly through the higher notes, showing brilliant breath control and voice projection. The percussion instrumentalists on the mridangam and tabla enthralled the audience with their brief *sawaal–javab* portion where each responds to the other's rhythmic challenge.

The concluding composition was the famous bhajan by philosopher and theologian Shankaracharya that Pandit Jasraj has performed in numerous concerts and transformed the environment with his spiritually charged rendition. It was a devotee of Krishna who had first requested Pandit Jasraj to sing the bhajan many years ago. A firm believer in the concepts of karma and cosmic coincidence, he agreed to the devotee's request and composed the music of the bhajan which became one of his most memorable performances. Pandit Jasraj's rendition of '*Om Namo Bhagwate*' was layered with simplicity and dynamism.

Talking about the rendition, he says,
'Technical finesse is important, but with a composition like 'Om Namo Bhagwate' *one needs to enter into an intense and honest emotional state. When I present this bhajan, I sing not as a classical musician, but as a* bhakt *(devotee).'*[6]

By dint of his devotion to his art, audience and spiritual beliefs, Pandit Jasraj has won the hearts of many with his mystical and transformative feats through music. His performance of Raga Dhulia Malhar in 1998 is believed to have brought down the rains on a sultry summer night in Delhi; in Varanasi at the Sankat Mochan temple, his soulful rendition of Raga Todi inspired a deer to emerge at the venue and listen enchanted in the midst of humans. In fact, two doctors in Pune have studied the medical effects of his music on patients.

With the humility of a true master, he says,
'I am fortunate to be a musician because music is a divine experience. When I am performing, it is not just me who is producing the music, I am guided by some greater power.'[7]

Accompanying artistes

Vocal accompaniment: Rattan Mohan Sharma, Tripti Mukherjee, Ankita Joshi, Durga Jasraj
Mridangam: Sridhar Parthasarathy
Tabla: Pandit Ramkumar Mishra
Harmonium: Mukund Petkar

16 May 2015

A CENTURY OF MUSIC

Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan

More than a century old, Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, dressed in a golden-beige kurta and a regal topi, arrived on stage on a wheelchair and was carried by his disciples onto the platform. It was awe-inspiring to remember that Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan was once a royal court singer in the last century. With the changing era and social context, he had tirelessly transformed his vocal skills, style of musical presentation and interaction with the audience. At the same time, his *gayaki* (singing style) was reminiscent of the old-world charm of the Gwalior gharana that would enrapture the purist.

Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan (19 August 1908–18 February 2016) was one of the foremost stalwarts of the Gwalior gharana of Hindustani classical music. His father Chhote Yusuf Khan and uncle Bade Yusuf Khan were his gurus. He had served as the court singer in the royal court of Gwalior in the early part of the twentieth century and later, he was a resident guru at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata. Among other honours, he received the Padma Bhushan in 2013 and was the oldest person ever to be conferred a Padma award.

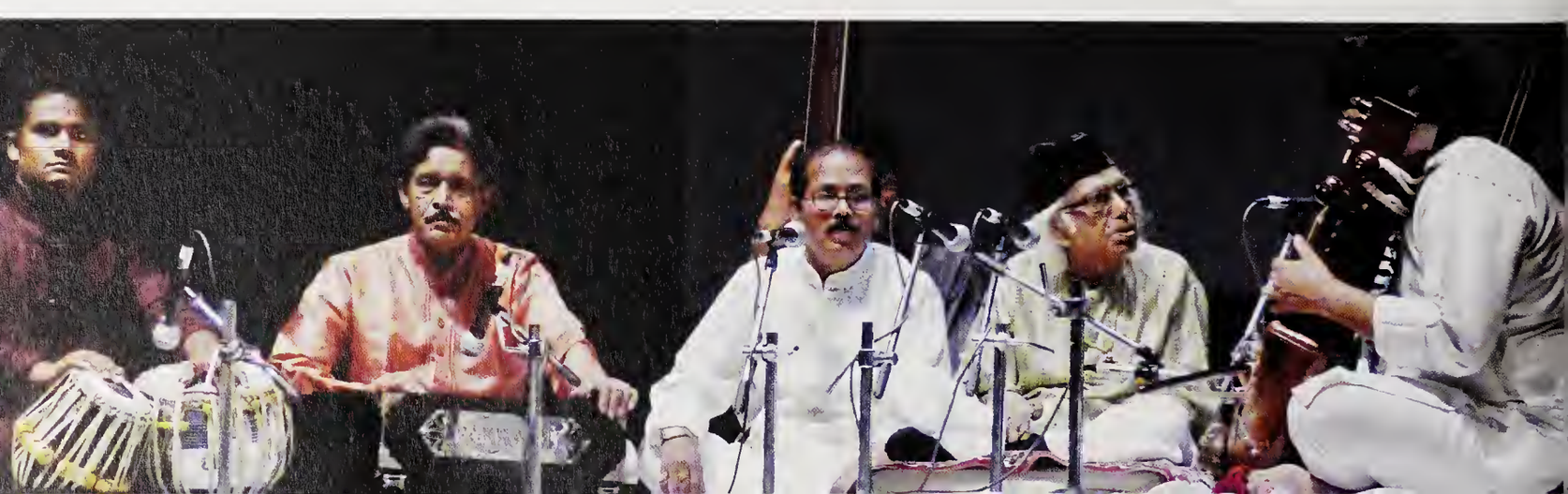


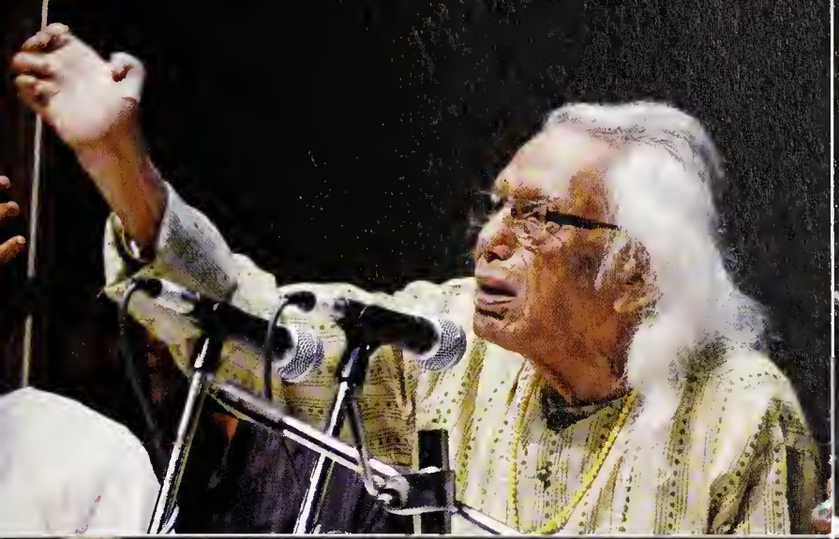
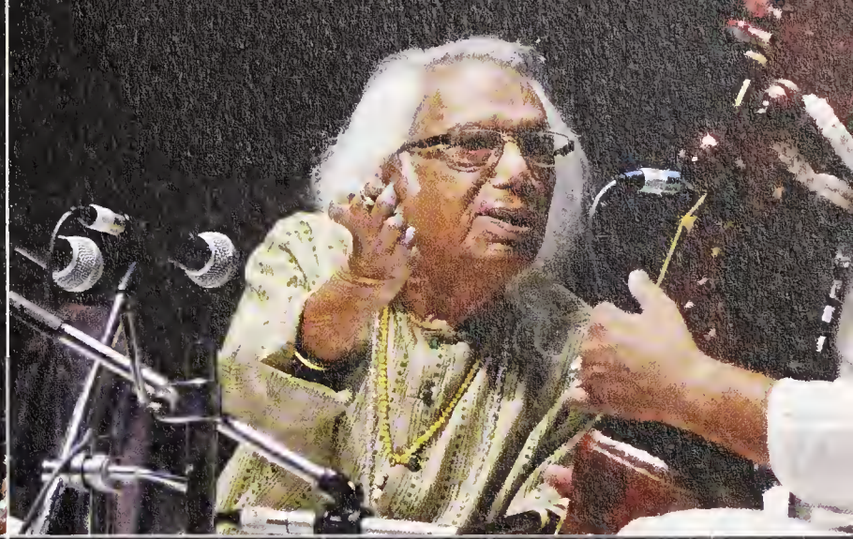
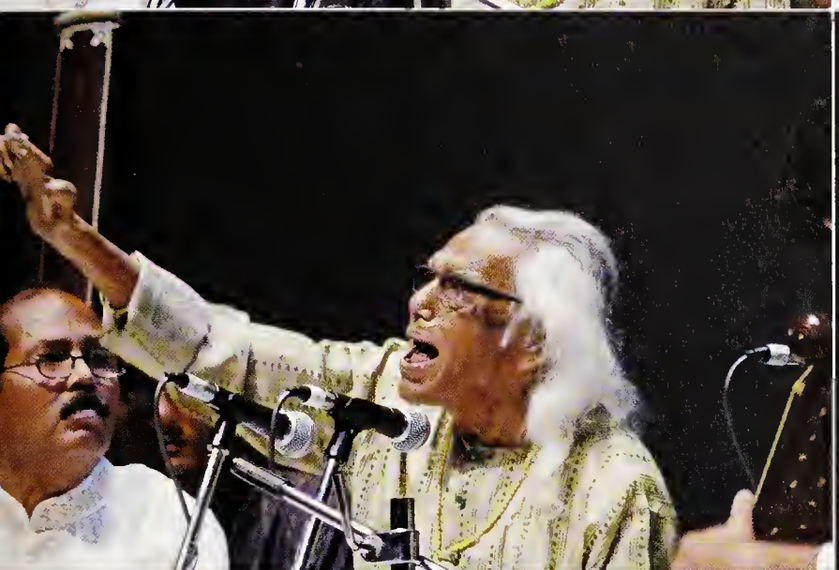
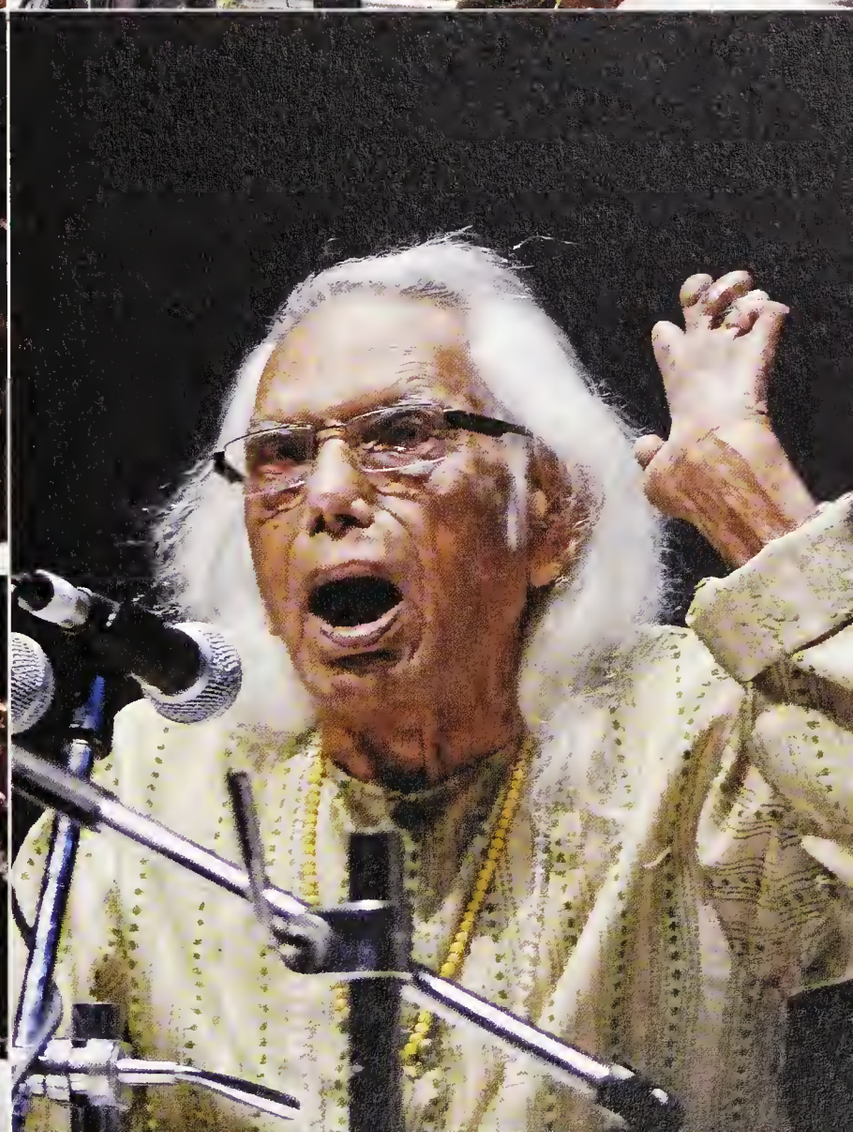
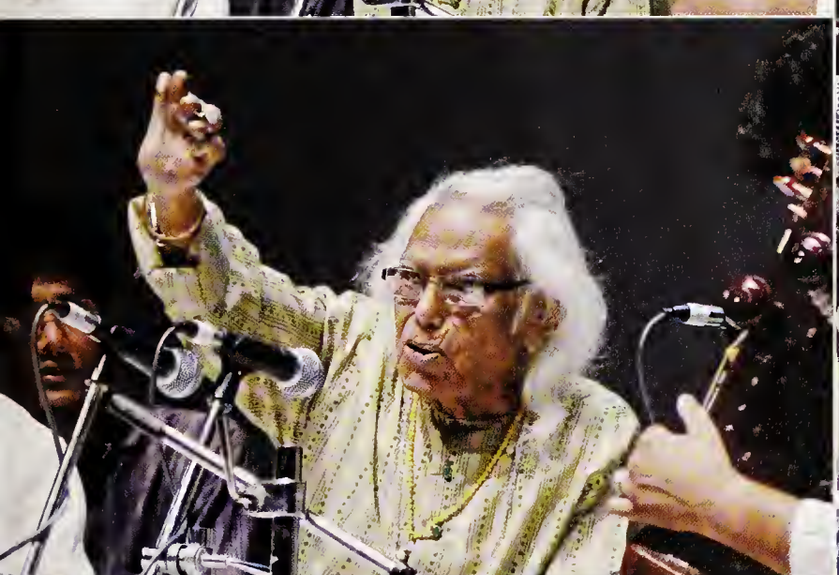
As the performance started, Khan sahib initiated a leisurely *alaap* in Raga Madhuvanti. A relatively modern raga, Madhuvanti is also known as Ambika or Madhumalati. A raga that lends itself effortlessly to romantic as well as pensive compositions, it is an early evening raga.

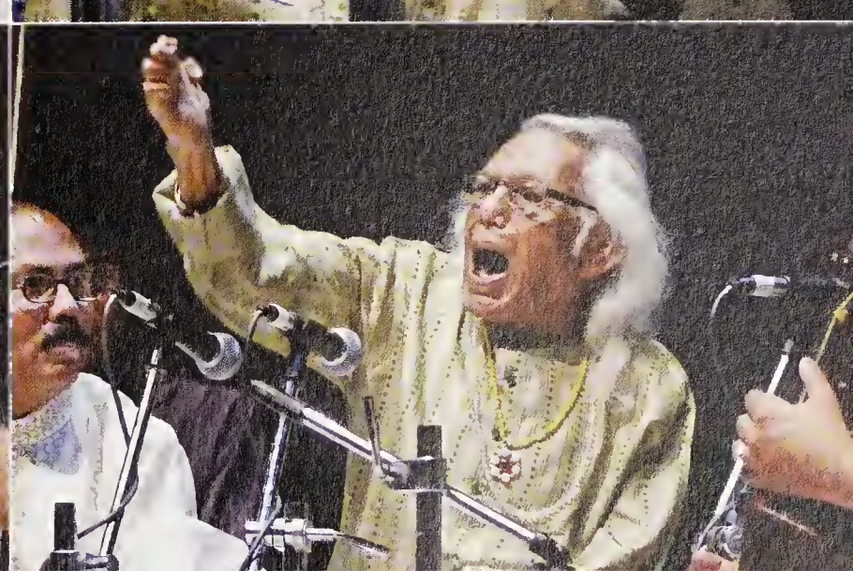
Robust voice projection and rhythm-play were the maestro's forte. The *bandish* he chose depicted the poignant moment after the wedding when the daughter leaves her parental home. Khan sahib delved more deeply into the raga movement than the emotive aspects of the lyrics in this presentation. At one point he amazed the audience with his vocal feat as he glided to the lower *saptak* (octave) and stayed on the lower *shadaj* note, displaying brilliant breath control and command over the bass notes. He unfolded numerous *sargam* patterns with vigour, his disciples interweaving the spaces with their improvisations. Towards the end of the composition, he rendered a set of thunderous *taans*, a pattern that defines the Gwalior gharana technique.

Talking about his musical lineage and the intricacies of the Gwalior gharana vocalism, he said:

*'My tradition is directly connected with Miyan Tansen. As you know, Miyan Tansen had four sons—Raheemsen, Suratsen, Tarangsen, Bilaskhan. We belong to the lineage of the second son—Suratsen. Earlier, dhrupad-dhamaar used to be sung in the Gwalior gharana. Then the foundations of the khayal were formulated by Amir Khusro. Since then, mainly khayal is sung in the gharana, but khayal is also based on dhrupad-*ang. *The* gayaki *of this gharana is based on '*ashtang*', the eight important elements of a khayal.* Gamak, meend, murki, bol-behlava *and* taan *are important features of the* gayaki. *Also, it is '*khule akaar ki gayaki*' (open-mouthed singing style) and the enunciation is absolutely clear. Today you can hardly understand the lyrics that people sing. Nowadays people sing only in* ektaal, jhumra, tilvada *and* teentaal, *but we used rhythmic cycles like* ashtamangal, rudrataal, bhanumati, gaja jhampa *and so many more. Tappa-*ang *is also a special feature of our* gayaki.*'*[8]





Khan sahib's elaborate hand gestures traced the movement of the notes through space, evoking a sense of kinaesthetic visuality to complement the music. As his disciples concluded an elaborate *sargam* segment, he gestured with his hands outstretched like a focused music conductor and began the *chhota khayal* set to teentaal. The composition depicted the romantic nature of the raga, and also revealed the intricacies of social life. As in most classical *bandishes*, the feminine voice is central to the lyrics. In this composition, the protagonist expresses her apprehension of social ostracism due to an amorous relationship: *'Balma maika tore karanwa, logwa karein badnaam.'* The second *antara* revealed that the composer of the piece was Khan sahib himself. His insightful observations on social relations along with his deep musical understanding contributed to making his repertoire an active archive of the social history of the past century. Underlying the musical virtuosity in his khayal compositions, there was a social critique that gives a voice to the woman, as she expresses her desire to express, speak and live freely. In a subtle manner, his composition questions the idea of freedom of choice and the conflict between the individual and society.

> ***A prolific composer, he wrote under the pseudonym 'Rasan Piya'. Reflecting on his inspiration for composing, he said,***
> *'My ancestor, Ustad Chand Khan sahib, was not educated but he was very fluent in Brajbhasha and he wrote four lakh thumris. So this is a legacy I received. The* sahitya *(literature) of his compositions is so rich, it inspired me to start composing.'*[9]

He concluded his exploration of Raga Madhuvanti with a feisty tarana and after a brief phrase he switched to Raga Bhoopali, mentioning that it was a special request from the audience. The lilting *madhya laya* (medium tempo) composition *'Aavo ji more ghar piya'* is an old *bandish* from his extensive repertoire. The *antara* was in praise of Fateh Ali Jarnail Bahadur, eulogizing him as the *'sultan of sur'* (king of melody). Possibly this is a reference to the court singer of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar. This was followed by the *chhota khayal*: *'Mandilara baaje'* which interspersed intricate rhythm patterns with the playful *bol* (instrument sounds used as lyrics) in the tarana style.

The next presentation was a *bandish* in Raga Shankara-Bihag. This is a combination raga, predominantly Raga Bihag with traces of Raga Shankara. The *bandish* was composed by Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, with the lyrics:

Nayo ambar nayi pawan,
nayi badar nayi bijriya,
nayi fuhar nayi bhum,
barsat jhum jhum.

The composition created a refreshing, joyful mood, celebrating the onset of spring.

Midway through the *layakari* (improvisations in rhythm and tempo), he decided to move to the next composition. This final piece was a devotional composition. The bhajan was in praise of Ram and each *antara* started with *dohe* or verses.

Khan sahib felt that technological and social change had brought about many shifts in the music world and that at the same time, the attitude of listeners also underwent a transformation:

'The end of royal patronage was a huge transition. The music conferences started and we also started exploring those. The microphone entered the music world. It was quite strange in the beginning. Music appreciation has to be inculcated. Earlier the social position of musicians was very low, it was not a respectable profession. Now things have changed. Listeners are also quite discerning. There are many people who sing well, but for your music to be effective, to have 'asar', 'taseer', *to touch the listener, is rare. For that you need the blessings of your guru, sensitivity towards the world and sincerity towards your art.'* [10]

The veteran vocalist, Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan passed away on 18 February 2016, at the age of 107. He left behind a rich legacy of music, musings and memories. With over two decades as a guru at ITC Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata, he had a large number of students who affectionately called him 'Baba'. His music remains a cornerstone of twentieth-century classical vocalism and continues to inspire a generation of artistes. The music world hopes to see these upcoming vocalists finding their niche and carrying forward the tradition of musical excellence and determined discipline.

Accompanying artistes

Vocal accompaniment: Subhomoy Chatterjee
Sarangi: Murad Ali
Harmonium: Zameer Ahmed Khan
Tabla: Bilal Khan



6 June 2015

GLIDING THROUGH THREE OCTAVES

Begum Parveen Sultana

With a voice that flows effortlessly through three octaves, Begum Parveen Sultana possesses a tremendous stage presence. Dressed in a resplendent purple and yellow saree, she was seated on the stage with the tanpura, eyes closed, one hand on the left ear and the other outstretched. Born into a family of avid music lovers in Assam, Begum Parveen Sultana was initiated into music by her father, Janab Ikramul Majid, who encouraged her in the pursuit of her passion for music at every step. The foundation of a dazzling musical edifice was laid when she started her *taleem* (training) with Pandit Chinmoy Lahiri in Kolkata. Rigorous voice training and musical precision being the hallmark of Pandit Lahiri, young Parveen soon emerged as a prodigious performer under his guidance.

Begum Parveen Sultana was born in Nagaon city, Assam. A Hindustani classical vocalist known for her tremendous vocal range, she has been trained by Pandit Chinmoy Lahiri and Ustad Dilshad Khan. In 1976, she was the youngest person to be awarded the Padma Shri and was also honoured with the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1998 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014. She is also known for lending her voice to songs in Hindi movies such as Gadar, Kudrat, Do Boond Pani *and* Pakeezah, *and several Assamese films.*



Reminiscing about the childhood days of learning from her guru, Pandit Chinmoy Lahiri, Begum Parveen Sultana says,
'Even as a child, music was my passion. My guru was a hard taskmaster but I never felt it was a chore to practise because it was exciting to delve into the nuances of swar, raga *and* taal.'[11]
The vocalist holds the evening Ragas Yaman, Puriya Dhanashri and Maru Bihag close to her heart – *'... (These) are my favourites because we start our musical careers with these ragas.* Woh kahavat hai na ki ek saadho toh sau saadho *(There's a saying that mastering one is like mastering a hundred).'*[12]

Picking out some evergreen compositions from one of her favourite ragas, Raga Puriya Dhanashri, was the first presentation of the evening. A compelling, meditative sunset raga that employs all seven notes, Puriya Dhanashri is very close to Poorvi, its parent scale. Begum Parveen Sultana started her exposition of the raga with a luxurious *alaap*, arriving precisely at the higher notes, and taking a gentle *meend* (glide) to the lower octave. Mukundraj Deo joined her with the tabla in the *bada khayal*, *'Laagi mori lagan,'* set to vilambit (slow tempo) ektaal. The full-throated *aakar* showed immense vocal dexterity. A unique pattern the artiste follows is shadowing her voice through the repetition of the same notes in a slightly lower volume in the same breath, softly, simulating an echo effect. Lightning-fast *taan* patterns followed each other as the pace moved up to settle into the *drut* or *chhota khayal* set to teentaal, *'Paayalia jhankar.'* In the earlier composition, the artiste had focused on *sargam* and *aakaar taan*s while the *chhota khayal* displayed cascading *bol taan*s and quick *sargam* phrases.

A tarana in Raga Hansadhwani followed, composed by her guru and husband, Ustad Dilshad Khan. She often presents his compositions in concerts. Affectionately called the 'grand couple of Hindustani classical music' they complement each other as a formidable team of guru–shishya, husband–wife and duet artistes. Begum Parveen Sultana and her father attended a concert of Ustad Dilshad Khan in Mumbai in the early 1970s that left them in awe of his superb technique and soulful *gayaki*. Keen to learn these intricacies of the Patiala gharana, she soon became his disciple. In 1975 they married and also started presenting *jugalbandi* concerts.

With a twinkle in her eye and a smile in her voice, Begum Parveen Sultana says,
'I was drawn to his (Ustad Dilshad Khan's) brilliant musicianship when I first attended his concert. I came to know later that he is also a master composer. His bandishes *have a perfect balance of lyrical grace,* raagdaari *and improvisational space. Now, of course, I insist that he create the best compositions exclusively for me (laughs)!'*[13]







Starting with the *aochar* (brief opening), Begum Parveen Sultana quickly moved over to the *layakari* (improvisations in rhythm and tempo) which is the main attraction of the tarana. Complex, fast-paced *sargam taans* in the drut teentaal rendition gave way to robust expansion in the upper octave. Borrowed from Carnatic music, Raga Hansadhwani is a late evening raga that has become quite popular in the Hindustani style as well. With the *gandhar* note as the pivot point, the artiste concluded the composition with a variety of *swar* patterns.

Reflecting on the craft of musical versatility, she says,
'I would attribute it completely to riyaaz *(practice). Talent in itself is not enough, there is no short cut, one has to hone one's abilities through daily practice and rigorous rehearsal.*

This is the only way to gain complete mastery over your musical talent. Both my gurus emphasized this and it has now become a habit for me. No matter how busy I am with performances or recordings, I devote some part of my day to riyaaz. *In fact, Ustad Dilshad Khan often says, "*Riyaaz karo toh raaj karo*" (practise and you will rule). This is the mantra I follow.'*[14]



After the musical virtuosity of the tarana, the vocalist delved into the emotive nuances with a Meera bhajan. Set to tune by Ustad Dilshad Khan, in dadra taal (six-beat rhythm cycle), *'Main toh lino Govind mol'* provided an opportunity for exploring the devotional through versatility of musical expression.

The concluding composition was a thoughtful selection. *'Bhavani dayani,'* the *sadra* (composition set to a 10-beat rhythm cycle) in Raga Bhairavi, is undoubtedly one of Begum Parveen Sultana's evergreen renditions. A composition attributed to renowned musician and musicologist Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, the devotional composition set to jhaptaal has been rendered by many vocalists, yet the recording from a concert by Begum Parveen Sultana remains the iconic classic. Largely spaced out in the *uttaranga*, or the higher notes in the octave, the composition was presented by the artiste in the style closely reminiscent of her own earlier recording.

Accompanying artistes

Tabla: Mukundraj Deo

Harmonium: Srinivas Acharya



5 November 2015

A SYNCRETIC TRADITION

Nizami Bandhu

For the Nizami Bandhu, the sufiana qawwali is not just a musical genre, but their way of life. As an extended family of qawwali musicians, they continue the tradition of performing at the shrine of the Sufi saint, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, where they also reside. People of all religions throng to the shrine on Thursday to get immersed in their music. The syncretic and spiritually charged environment at the Dargah (shrine) inspired them to present a similar repertoire in their performance at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The sufiana qawwali trio, called the Nizami Bandhu, consists of Ustad Chand Nizami, Shadab Faridi Nizami and Sohrab Faridi Nizami. They belong to a family of musicians of the Sikandra gharana who have been performing the qawwali for the past seven centuries. They are the descendents of the court singers at the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi and specialize in performing the qawwali compositions written by the thirteenth-century poet and musician, Amir Khusro, who was a spiritual disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya. They have also featured in films.





They say,

'We have performed at festivals across the world but the environment at the Dargah is strikingly different. We felt honoured and proud to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and presented the same repertoire of pure sufiana qawwali that we perform at the sacred shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya.' [15]

Seated in semi-circular rows on the rostrum, the members of the qawwali group set the pace of the performance with the energetic rhythmic clapping that is characteristic of the qawwali. A sense of the collective emerged as they clapped in unison while the lead vocalist began with a high note. Adhering to the traditional repertoire by focusing on compositions of Amir Khusro, the musicians presented a gamut of devotional compositions expressing the Sufi philosophy of reaching out to the Supreme Being and creating a peaceful and equal world that would cut across religious and cultural differences. The seamless blend of poetry and ideology found its way into their eclectic selection and fresh interpretation. The Manqabat qawwali, a Sufi devotional song composed by Amir Khusro in praise of Ali ibn Abi Talib, son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad—'*Man kunto maula*'—was interspersed with new verses by Ustad Ghulam Faridi Nizami framed within a secular and syncretic belief system, '*Mere maula ka jis par karam ho gaya, woh satyam shivam sundaram ho gaya*'. The refrain of '*Chhaap tilak*' (another qawwali composed by Amir Khusro) was layered with *dohe* (couplets) of another fifteenth-century mystic saint-composer, Kabir. By creating this dialogue between composers and mystics across centuries, the Nizami Bandhu achieve a rare confluence of music streams and shared ideologies that enrich their music with a deep grounding in history, yet with their own interpretations.

The Nizami Bandhu have also performed in Hindi films and the final part of the performance featured their famous song from the 2011 movie *Rockstar*, '*Kun faya kun*'.

The leading members of the Nizami Bandhu group are the trio—Ustad Chand Nizami, and his nephews Shadab Faridi Nizami and Sohrab Faridi Nizami.

The specific music style and philosophy they follow today can be attributed largely to the towering figure from the earlier generation—Ustad Mehmood Nizami, who was deeply revered and given the title of 'Sultan Ragi' by Dr Rajendra Prasad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

Ustad Chand Nizami is also a poet and has written many nazms and ghazals. Shadab Faridi Nizami and Sohrab Faridi Nizami are the sons of his brother, Ustad Ghulam Faridi Nizami, who was also a prolific poet and had written many qawwalis, nazms, ghazals and bhakti songs under the pseudonym Jazbi Dehlvi. After his demise, his sons started training and performing with their uncle. His poetry often finds its way into their music as they interweave a variety of genres, which is the specialty of their gharana.



Reflecting on the unique tradition they say,
'The Sikandra gharana of Uttar Pradesh is one of the few styles where the artistes sing both the khayal and the qawwali. There are five basic aspects while reciting qawwali—naksh, gul, kalwana, qaul and rang. Qawwali starts with qual and concludes with rang. It is said that Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer had his meals only after listening to qawwali. Since his era, qawwali developed as a musical form and was patronized by Hazrat Amir Khusro who introduced new ragas, created instruments like the tabla, and composed in different languages.'[16]



The Sufi musical tradition embraces a number of different compositions and lends itself easily to poetic exploration in Hindi and Urdu. Representing the rich cultural kaleidoscope of medieval times, the musical stream has evolved continuously as a popular genre accessible to all and therefore, sustains its contemporary relevance. The musicians believe their music is the core of their life philosophy,



'For us, the sufiana qawwali is an expression of unity and equality of all. The qawwali is a form of prayer that stands for peace and brotherhood between all communities. Sometimes when we are singing in festivals abroad, we are aware that people in the audience do not understand the language of the lyrics, but what we try and convey is faith and spirituality through the soul of our music.'[17]



Accompanying artistes

Zafar Ahmad	Nazim Ahmad
Qaisar Ahmad	Mohd. Shoib
Zeeshan Ahmad	Kamran Nizami
Ishtiyaq Ahmad	Gulkhan Nizami

10 December 2015

RINGING IN CHRISTMAS

The Ao Naga Choir

A single file of 19 men and women, members of the Ao Naga Choir, stood on a platform covering two-thirds of the stage. Dressed in traditional red and black Naga mekhela or the wrap-around long skirts (girls) and Naga jackets (boys), they looked colourful and elegant. The costumes represented the 17 different tribes and the sub-tribes of Nagaland. The stage symbolized a community gathering for a special occasion and indeed it was one—it was the build up to Christmas, the season's festivity, and the Ao Naga choir from the nearby church was invited to sing hymns and carols for the distinguished audience.

Lanu Yaden, is the founder member of the Ao Naga Choir but also represents his ensemble as most of the choir members come from civil service backgrounds—Laden's father was in the Indian Police Service. Young people in this group were sent in their childhood for education to Kolkata, Delhi or other big cities. Laden was educated at St Edmund School under the Irish Christian brothers in Shillong, followed by a university education at St Stephen's College, Delhi University, and subsequently, political studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. The members of the repertory go for formal music training abroad and on their return, take up jobs in schools as music teachers. They can be found in fifty-seven such schools in and around Delhi and the National Capital Region.



Lanu Yaden says:

'The Naga language is musical and singing is a natural expression. Folk stories are narrated in musical overtones and a musical format is part of all ceremonies and festivals. The centrality of the church as social life and singing as a social activity is significant for us.

In 2009, under the aegis of the Delhi Ao Baptist Church, we started the choir at the Cathedral Church of Redemption, which is located close to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. It was the Viceroy's chapel with the architecture and the interior details, such as the pew, going back to colonial time and capturing the colonial ambience. An interesting part of the architecture is a path leading from the church to the Viceroy's office. Our church has an antique organ.' [18]

The choir comprises mostly members from the Naga community who gather in their church to sing in unison and celebrate a joyous way of community life. For many in the audience, the singing of Christmas carols and hymns evokes a memory of Jesuit schools and colleges or growing up in post-colonial cities where they reveled in remembering their past through festivities like Christmas. The Naga community choir, however, is an assemblage of contemporary times and the group singing on stage in perfect coordination and harmony expressed a cultural identity in a cosmopolitan sense.

In the context of the selection of carols made for the Rashtrapati Bhavan event, Yaden says:

'We blend the repertoire to represent various genres. For the mass and choir we, of course, sing the more traditional European hymns. In our repertoire of Christmas carols we try to include new carols, like the rendition of the Ukranian hymn "Carol of the Bells". Our selection of the repertoire is done in a democratic fashion. As the Rastrapati Bhavan audience was not tuned to hard core choirs which are more theological- and doctrine-based, we replenished the repertoire with carols and popular tunes.' [19]

The repertoire comprised two distinct parts: the first, hymns in honour of Christmas while the second constituted more popular carols and songs, not merely as entertainment but also as inclusive moments where everyone became part of the group singing.

The hymns included 'Gloria, Angels we've heard on high' (in Excelsis Deo), 'Look at the World' and 'Hallelujah', the version which accompanies the hymn, 'As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Lord', finally ending with 'Angels we've heard on high' being sung again. A common theme of appreciating the world weaves these traditional and


AN ODE TO INDIA'S TIMELESS CULTURAL HERITAGE
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI



well-known hymns together, encompassing nature, landscape, tree, mountains, valley, river, fields, plains, fruits, flowers and the changing seasons. Inherent in these hymns is the story of life cycles and a popular folk consciousness. In most Christmas carols, the shepherd is the popular figure, and it is his celebration that becomes the larger joy of mankind.

The choir made an easy transition from hymns to their popular song repertoire comprising Christmas carols and other songs of a similar genre. The closely knit group suddenly became performers who opened up to their audience, representing a larger community coming together through celebrations and festivities. This section included the Christmas song made popular by Nat King Cole, 'Chestnuts roasting in an open fire', a song about the family celebrating Christmas and the day-to-day life and traditions around Christmas. The full-throated voice of the soloist resounded in the auditorium, giving the song a vibrancy in keeping with Christmas.

The subsequent songs moved from a slower pace and sentimental lyrics into a more vigorous tempo, urging friends to join in:

'Just hear those sleigh bells jingling
Ring-ting-tingling too,
Come on, it's lovely weather,
For a sleigh ride together with you...'

The soloist sang while the rest of the choir sat on the platform on chairs, clapping and keeping rhythm. Their expressions clearly showed that they were listening intently to the words and tunes and maybe like many of us in the audience, singing along silently.

The songs that followed were duets 'Home' (Michael Bublé and Blake Shelton) and the fast and uplifting 'Walking in the winter wonderland', capturing the longing to be together with the family for Christmas. The sense of close ties was enhanced when the audience was invited to sing along too.



The final piece came back to the invocation of Christ and the birth of the Lord with:

'The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make His face to shine upon you.
To shine upon you and be gracious,
And be gracious unto you.'

The transition from popular songs to the final hymn was introduced by a playful chorus when the group once again came together, the two soloists merging back into the group.

Bathed in blue and magenta light, particularly on a projection of a bare winter's tree in the wings, the red and black figures of the performers created a subdued scenography, evoking the celebratory ambience of the Christmas season. The quiet and calmness of the hymns interspersed with the spurts of energy and robustness of the singers symbolized the Christmas spirit of Yuletide and the New Year. Memories of a bygone era witnessed by the Rashtrapati Bhavan returned through the performance and general goodwill was generated.

Reflecting on the special time of festivity for the community, Yaden says:
'The memories and identities are strong and comes from the experience of our parents and the prolonged struggle of the Naga people to maintain their unique identity which culminated with Nagaland becoming the sixteenth state of India in 1963.

Over the last decade or so, there has been a sizable number of North-easterners who are beginning to settle down and assimilate with the mainstream. Like all other communities from the rest of the country, more and more people from our community come to the cities in pursuit of higher education or lately; as economic migrants who come here to take root, wanting to create a better livelihood for themselves. Inherent in such a migration lies the trauma of displacement.'[20]



9 February 2016

A PURIST'S DELIGHT

Ustad Rashid Khan

Many years ago, when Ustad Rashid Khan had performed at a prestigious music festival, the stalwart, Bharat Ratna Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, had commented after listening to him that the future of Hindustani vocal music was safe with young musicians like him. Since then, Ustad Rashid Khan has not only proved to be the beacon of hope for Hindustani classical music, but also nurtured the individuality and innovative potential within the *raagdaari* framework. He has emerged as one of the frontrunners of Hindustani vocal music today, striking a balance between the purist's delight and the inspiration for young aspiring musicians. Each performance is unique and Ustad Rashid Khan selects his repertoire spontaneously, responding to the environment and space, the audience's temperament and his own mood at each concert.

Born in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh, Ustad Rashid Khan is a noted vocalist of the Rampur–Sahaswan gharana. Hailing from a musical family, he is the great-grandson of Ustad Inayat Hussain Khan, the founder of the gharana. Initiated into music by his grand-uncle Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan, his talent was further honed by his uncle Ustad Ghulam Mustafa Khan. He is a resident guru at the ITC-Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata. He was awarded the Padma Shri and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2006 and the Padma Bhushan in 2013.





He says,

'I never pre-decide on my repertoire for any performance. My choice depends on my mood and the ambience and, of course, the audience. It is a spontaneous expression through music and responding to the space and audience. The Rashtrapati Bhavan was no exception and this allows the music to just flow naturally as it should.'[21]

Drawing the audience into the subtle grace of the late evening Raga Gorakh Kalyan, he presented two pensive and romantic compositions. Known for his *taankari* (artistry in using *taans*), and *layakari*, his vocalism has evolved out of rigorous training with his guru and granduncle, Ustad Nissar Hussain Khan. His greatest contribution to the Rampur–Sahaswan gharana is the way he diffuses the quintessential technical flamboyance of this style with gentle emotive appeal. The *bada khayal 'Dhan dhan bhag tero, gori tore naina salone'* is an old composition by Miyan Sadarang, the pseudonym of the eighteenth-century poet Niyamat Khan who served at the court of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah.

In the *chhota khayal, 'Eri mayee aaj piya nahi aye'*, Ustad Rashid Khan excelled in infusing the *sargam* with the mood of the raga. Shifting focus to the lyrics, the first few words of the verse opened into a vast expanse like the sea while he let the end of the line meander like a rivulet into a gentle *meend*. After a spate of soft *sargam* patterns he burst into a volley of *taans* to much applause. These elements of surprise have evolved into a hallmark of his style and keep the audience engaged and thrilled. As a performer, he connects with the audience through his musical excellence rather than stage presence.

Ustad Rashid Khan was 11 years old when he first performed on stage. In a career spanning many decades, he is one of the most recorded Hindustani classical artistes today.

However, he confesses a keen preference for the live performance over the recorded medium,

'A live performance is unbounded, whereas a performance for the media is time-bound. Responding to the ambience and creating an empathetic bond with the audience's mood and mine is only possible in a live performance. It is a humane communication which is woven in through music.'[22]

Although primarily a khayal gharana, a specialty of the Rampur–Sahaswan gharana is that it gives equal importance to a variety of other genres of Hindustani music like thumri, dadra and such forms. Over time, Ustad Rashid Khan has assimilated several thumris and dadras into his repertoire and has also been deeply influenced by the Punjabi-*ang* thumri style. After a selection of rare thumris, he concluded his performance with an evergreen composition popularized by the Patiala gharana doyenne, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan—'*Yaad piya ki aaye*'. Focusing on the mood of separation depicted in the composition, the vocalist punctuated each line with gentle pauses and nuanced cadences of the voice.

For Ustad Rashid Khan, music is a way of life. He has also sung a number of classical-based songs in Hindi films and continues to set a fine balance between the realm of popular entertainment and niche cultural circles.

Summing up his philosophy of life, he says,
'My life revolves around music and I do not see it as hardship or a process of performance-making, but something that comes and flows naturally and spontaneously. It establishes my feelings and sentiments with my listeners. I am communicating my life practice to them.'[23]

Accompanying artistes

Vocal accompaniment: Krishna Bongane
Tabla: Pandit Subhankar Banerjee
Harmonium: Vinay Kumar Mishra
Sarangi: Murad Ali



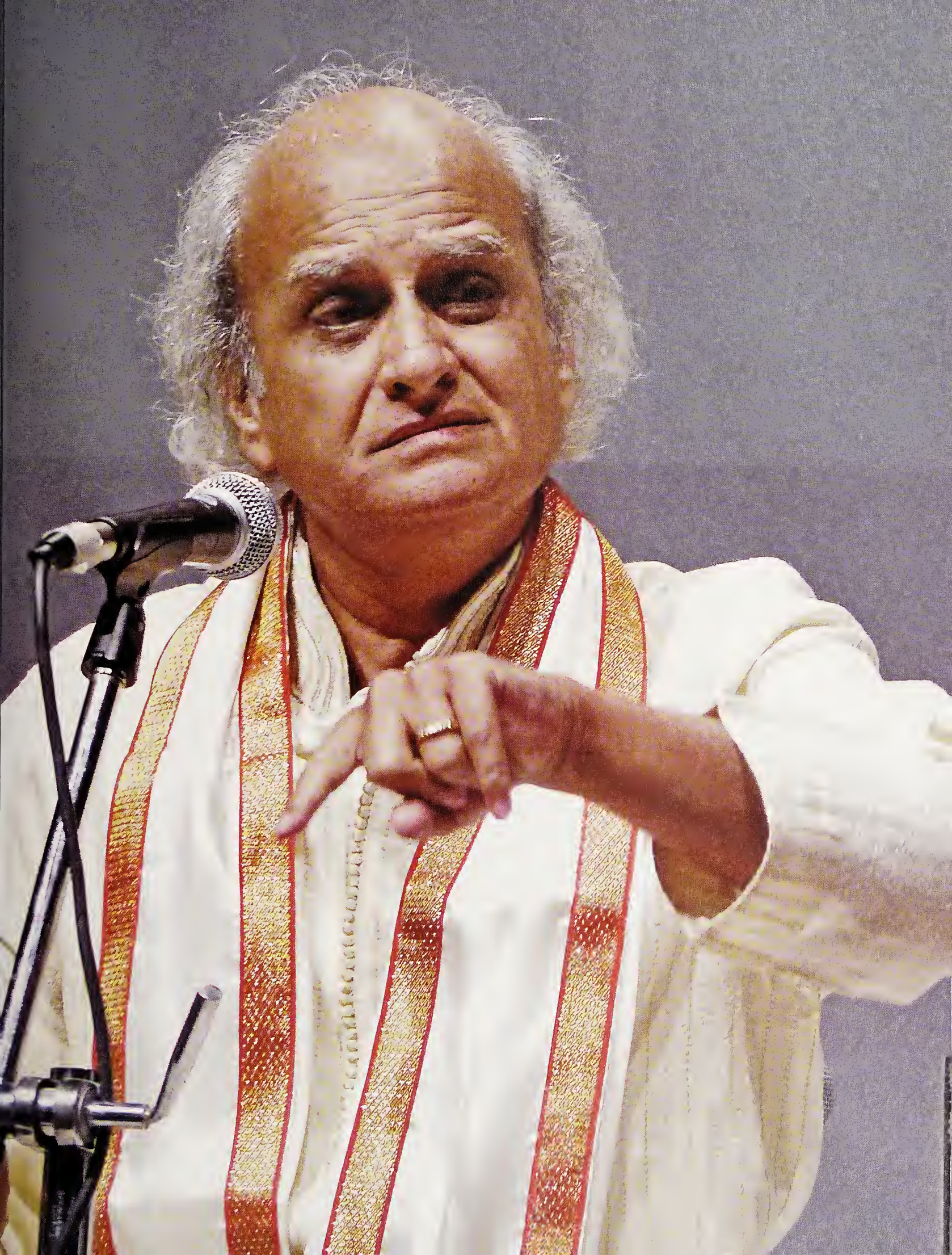
7 May 2016

RE-IMAGINING THE RAGA

Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar

Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar is known for his eclectic and intellectual approach to vocal music. He is also one of the contemporary classicists who have reclaimed the classical music space from the predominant familial and hereditary networks, making space for individual talent and mastery.

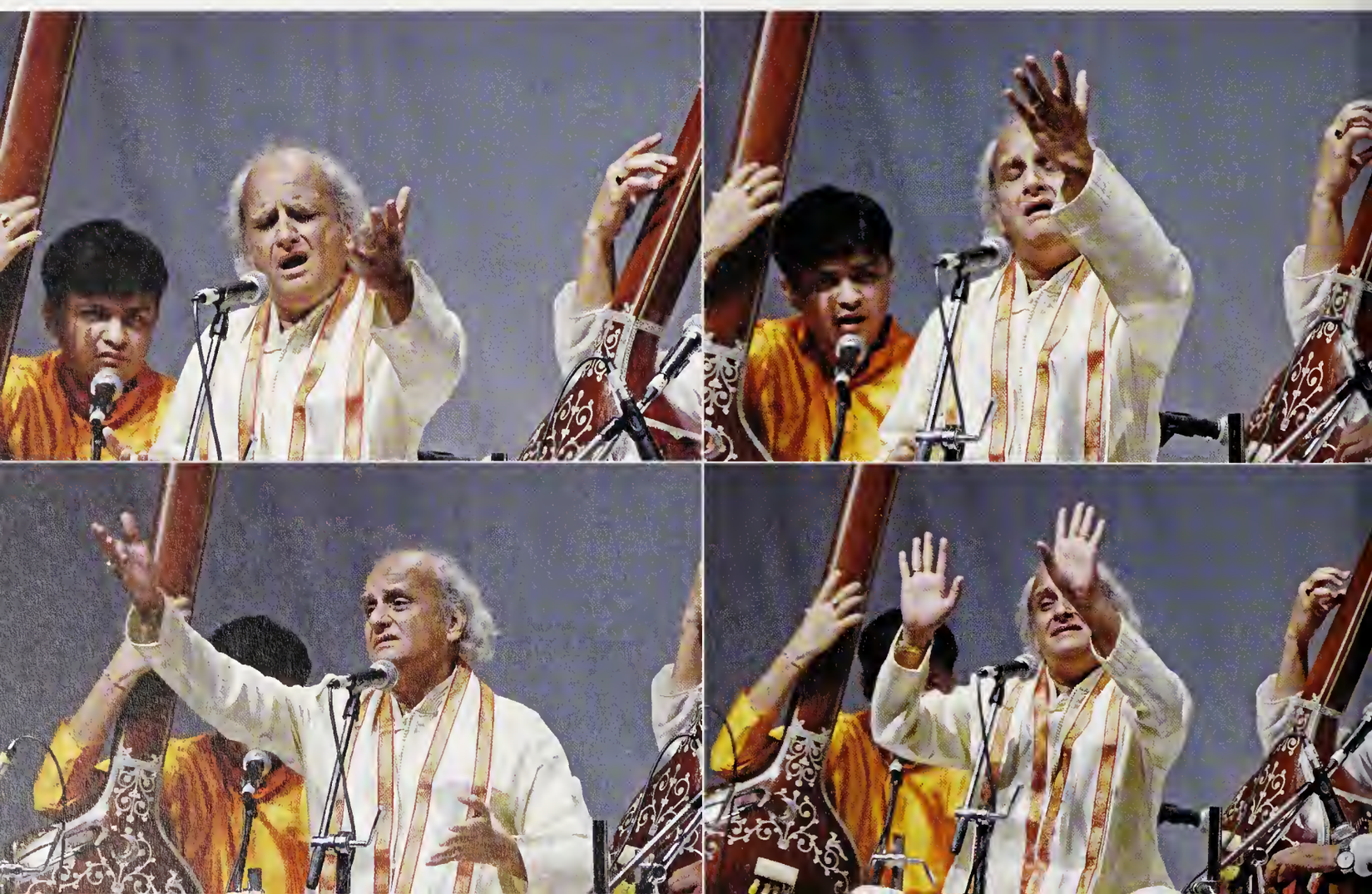
Trained in the Gwalior, Agra and Jaipur gharanas, Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar is a Hindustani classical vocalist. His father Nagesh Dattatreya Kashalkar, an advocate and musicologist, encouraged him to pursue music. He is a disciple of noted vocalists and scholars of music, Pandit Rajabhau Kogje and Professor Prabhakar Rao Khardenavis. A gold medallist post-graduate in music from Nagpur University, he underwent advanced training with Pandit Ram Marathe and vocalist and violinist Pandit Gajananrao Joshi. After working at All India Radio (AIR), he joined the ITC-Sangeet Research Academy as a resident guru and continues to mentor students there. He is a recipient of the Padma Shri in 2010 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2009.

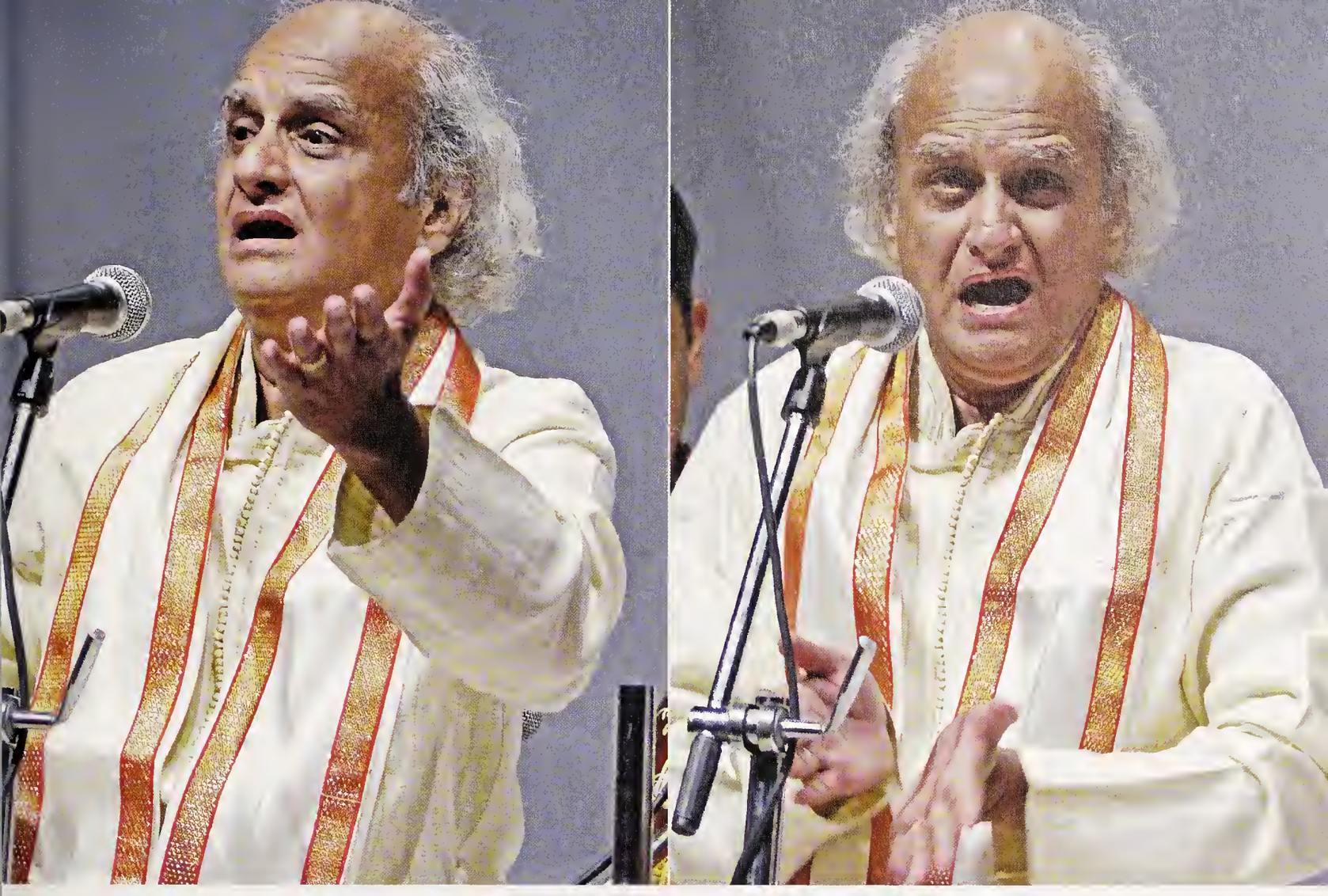


With training from gurus of three different gharanas, Pandit Kashalkar traces his allegiance to individual styles rather than gharanas,

'I know that many critics attempt to pin down my gayaki *into Gwalior, Agra or Jaipur—the styles I am trained in. But I strongly feel that I cannot say that either of these gharanas have a greater influence on me than the other. I have imbibed the techniques and beliefs of my gurus and they are reflected in my music. I do not try to mould my music into a gharana; my focus is on enriching my music with the essence of each raga that I present, and to share that with the audience.'*[24]

He chose Raga Marwa to set the mood for the evening. The flagship raga of the popular evening scale, Marwa *thaat*, it has six notes and captures the sober and contemplative ambience of a serene sunset. Pandit Kashalkar began the raga elaboration with a brief *alaap*, cradling the notes and extending the contours of the melody with vocal dexterity. Moving into the lyrics of the composition, he improvised on the *sthayi*, sketching out the canvas of





the raga through the repetitive *meend* to the *komal rishabh*, the predominant note or the *vadi swar* of the raga. The most compelling part of his music is that he approaches the raga with refreshing inventiveness that is grounded in tradition. An old composition, or an oft-sung raga, gets a new lease of life with his imaginative musicianship.

One of the most sought-after gurus at the ITC-Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata, Pandit Kashalkar has mentored a number of disciples. His two senior disciples and vocal accompanists, Ojesh Pratap Singh and Sameehan Kashalkar (his son), interspersed the rendition with proficient *aakar taan*s.

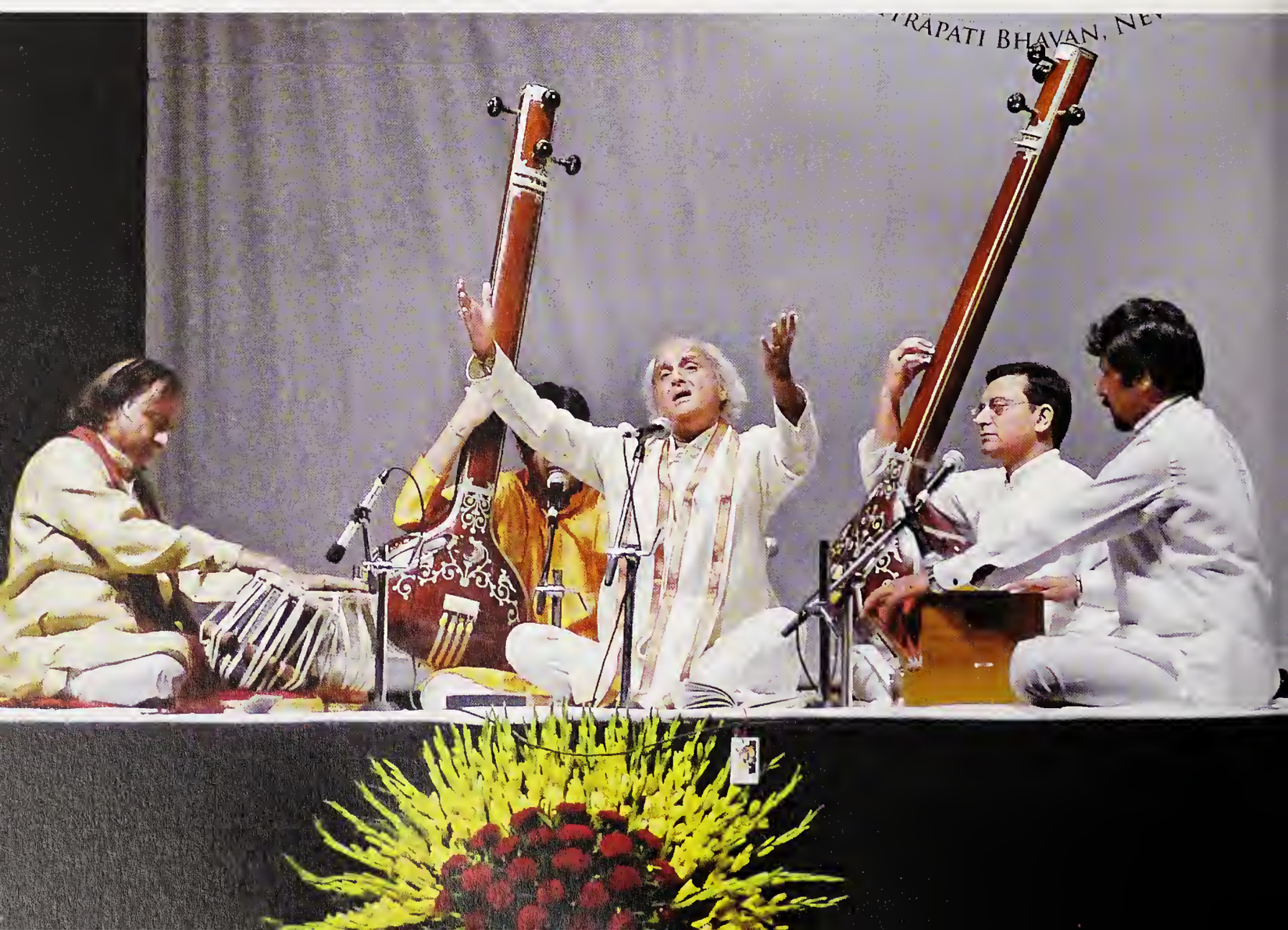
Reflecting on the growing pressures on young musicians, Pandit Kashalkar says,

'It is important for a student to be a good listener. One starts with imitating one's guru and arrives at one's own original style and musical maturity only after training and performing for a long time. Sometimes, students get impatient and I also feel that the audience and critics are too quick to judge a musician. They need time to build their work, to find their own music.' [25]

As a young boy in in the tiny town of Pandharkaoda, Maharashtra, Kashalkar was encouraged by his father to learn music. As he excelled in *Natya Sangeet* (popular music form of Maharashtra) competitions across the state, his father, a lawyer by profession, opened a local branch of the pan-Indian music school, Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, in the town. Later, Kashalkar started going to Mumbai to train with Marathi music director, actor and vocalist Pandit Ram Marathe and also earned his degrees in music from Nagpur. At crucial stages in his life journey, he refused a job as a lecturer and quit a stable job at All India Radio to pursue his passion for music.

> *Undaunted by life's circumstances, he devotedly followed a gruelling* riyaaz *routine,*
> *'*Riyaaz *is non-negotiable for a musician. One should not wait for a programme to come one's way to get serious about* riyaaz. *And* riyaaz *is not only vocal lessons. Thinking about music, listening to music and being intellectually engaged in it are all part of* riyaaz.*'*[26]

Over years of training and *riyaaz*, Pandit Kashalkar has assimilated a wide repertoire of compositions. He chose a *chhota khayal* composed by 'Gunidas' (as vocalist, composer and music guru Pandit Jagannathbuwa Purohit is known) to round off Raga Marwa. He was accompanied on the tabla by Pandit Suresh Talwalkar, an accomplished soloist, also known



as 'Taal Yogi'. The two maestros share a seamless rapport and noticeably enjoy and appreciate each other's music on stage as demonstrated in this performance.

Though Pandit Kashalkar usually focuses on the khayal in his presentations, in this special performance at the Rashtrapati Bhavan he sang a rare *bandish-ki-thumri* (a kind of thumri that emphasizes rhythm play) in Raga Khamaj— '*Koyalia kook sunaave*'. The popular Raga Bhairavi is often the concluding selection for a concert. Concentrating on the higher notes in his rendition, Pandit Kashalkar delved into the realm of the devotional with '*Tum ho jagat ke daata*'.

The sublime strains of his music resonate with the audience as they are transported into the peaceful aura of his music,
'One's music reflects one's state of mind,' says the maestro. 'When I look back at my own music, I sense restlessness. Today I think my music, like my self, is more anchored, quieter and at peace with life.

Accompanying artistes

Tabla: Pandit Suresh Talwalkar

Harmonium: Shriram Hasabnis

Vocal accompaniment: Ojesh Pratap Singh, Sameehan Kashalkar



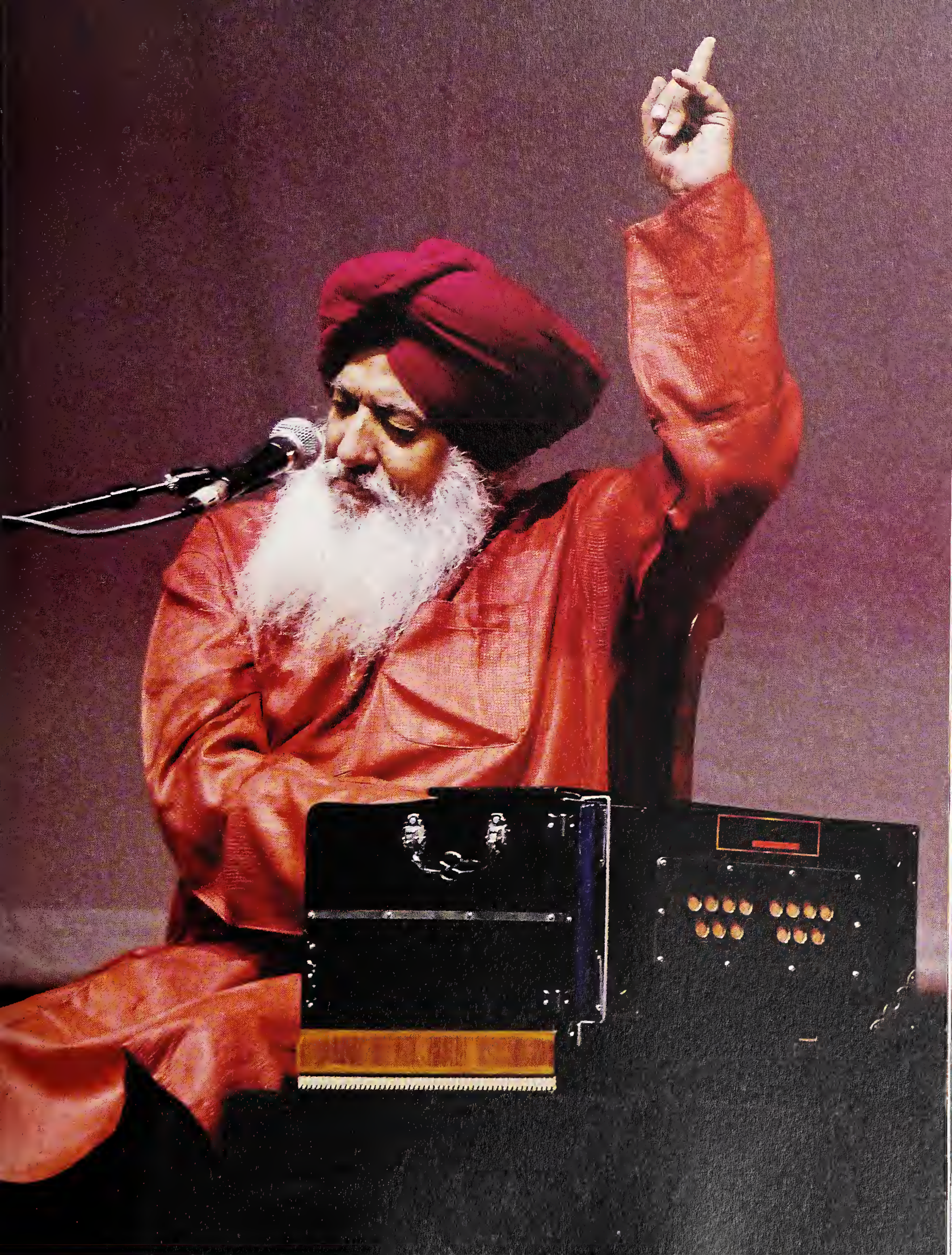
9 July 2016

SUFI MUSIC AND CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTION

Madan Gopal Singh and the Chaar Yaar Ensemble

Sufi music has emerged in contemporary times as a popular genre and is perceived as a cultural manifestation of communal harmony and secularism. With Madan Gopal Singh, its famed vocalist, rendering the songs, the Chaar Yaar ensemble presented Sufi music before a distinguished audience. The repertoire was carefully selected, aimed at expressing their democratic nature unambiguously.

Madan Gopal Singh is a scholar and practitioner whose interests range from poetry, linguistics, cinema and music which he performs and composes. Performing many years as an amateur he has turned himself and his repertory Chaar Yaar into a professional troupe. The ensemble, however, continues to combine practice with research and restricts the number of performances. He says, 'We do not record in studios but in our homes. Henceforth, we have decided to record in natural surroundings, allowing the sound of the breeze and birds and environment to filter through the soundscape.'





Madan Gopal Singh is a poet, singer and intellectual specializing in Sufi music. Trained for many years and then performing as an amateur, he now sings professionally with his group of musicians who perform western music (Deepak Castelino), on the sarod (Pritam Ghoshal) and percussion (Amjad A. Khan), the four members giving the ensemble its name, Chaar Yaar or four friends. Although their music experiments with songs and the poetry of cultures across the globe, the core genre of the repertory remains Sufi compositions. As the performance proceeded, the spirit of Sufi idealism enveloped the space and the audience.

The lead singer, Madan Gopal Singh, narrates his own evolution as a singer and performer. He says,

'Coming from a cosmopolitan background and a family that experienced the trauma and tragedy of Partition and displacement, I follow in the footsteps of my father, a multilingual and multicultural poet and scholar.

My father, a Sikh, two of his friends, one Muslim and one Hindu, would often go to the mosque in their neighbourhood at Lahore and sing. Our group—Chaar Yaar—also has similar multicultural, multiregional and multireligious identities.

I resisted calling ourselves Sufi or specialists in a historical Sufi cult. I have travelled extensively through the well-known Sufi sites and towns and tried to capture the day-to-day life of Sufi culture.'[27]

The pieces included a popular invocation composed by the Sufi saint from Punjab, Hazrat Sultan Bahoo, '*Alif Allah Chambey di Booty*' (God has planted the fragrant seed of love in my heart) as the Sufi manifestation of life and compositions from Kabir, playing around one single word '*Ananta*' (eternity or no end), regarded as an anthem of the Sufi genre which describes water, plants, trees, saplings, fragrance, and the bee paying reverence to nature. The single word recurs through its rendition, as a phrase, as a sentence and as the singer says, perhaps creating a universe in itself.



The *Dhamal* composition by Bulleh Shah, the Syed nobleman, philosopher and Sufi poet opened with a long prelude by the sarod, followed by the banjo, before the vocal rendering started. It is a typical Sufi song of love by Bulleh Shah for his murshid, the spiritual teacher, Shah Anayet, who belonged to the agricultural labouring class. Shah Anayet, at the request of the women of Bulleh Shah's family, is ready to depart from his house, but Bulleh sings and dances to stop his mentor from leaving.

Singh paused to explain how Sufi songs follow a certain pattern where a word is repeated frequently and also plays out in a loop. Both these elements allow the singer to create a musical experience of cajoling, teasing and even mocking. At this point, he demonstrated the loop returning to '*thaiya, thaiya thaiya*'. The phrase evokes the dance beats as Bulleh dances to detain his beloved guru. This was a song Bulleh wrote at the impending collapse of the Mughal empire, when the very fabric of society was collapsing and there was chaos, mayhem and intense struggle. The dance is a continuity of life amidst disruption but '*thaiya thaiya*' also is the beat of the robust steps of the dancer echoing the rhythm of destruction.

The religious syncretism of popular cults like Sufism is emphasized by compositions such as Bulleh Shah's celebration of Holi, moving effortlessly into Amir Khusro's compositions on the festival and finally, the Quran Sharif, which talks of colours and playing with them. The spirit of Holi, a traditional community festival celebrated with vibrant colours, blends with the Sufi repertoire's simplicity, love of nature and humanism. The songs talk of Hindus and Muslims being one and existing within one another.

Rarely does the band sing a pure single composition; instead, it brings in certain ideas inherent in the philosophy of Sufism to compile various verses and compositions. Singh opened a song with Rabindranath Tagore's famous lines, the '*...sky is full of stars and sun, the world is full of life and I have found my place in it*'. He says Tagore composed it in his later years, but it was probably influenced by Tagore's trip to Amritsar as a child when he earnestly listened to the singing at the Golden Temple. From the opening line of Tagore, he moved to a Guru Nanak composition from the *Gurbani* (compositions by Sikh Gurus and other writers), which expresses a similar sentiment and melody. Tagore's view of the world and religion is inspiring and traces a historical lineage which brings the past into the realm of the modern, and even the contemporary.

The highlight of the evening was what Singh called 'a song of bridges', blending compositions of Persian poet Rumi with those of saint-poet Kabir, Bulleh Shah and finally, Beatles singer John Lennon. The song addresses the murshid, to whom the disciple says, 'you have become wise and know who you are but I am unable to find out who I am, not a Mussalman, not a Jew, not a Zoroastrian.' Castelino joined in with John Lennon's classic dream envisaging one world without boundaries, 'Imagine there's no country, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for, no religion too'. The Sufi music and Lennon's dream merged as the singers sang the lyrics, 'You may say I am a dreamer but am not the only one...the world will be one'. At a time when religious wars and hatred are killing millions all over the world, the messages of love and the renditions of the songs touched the hearts of one and all in the audience.

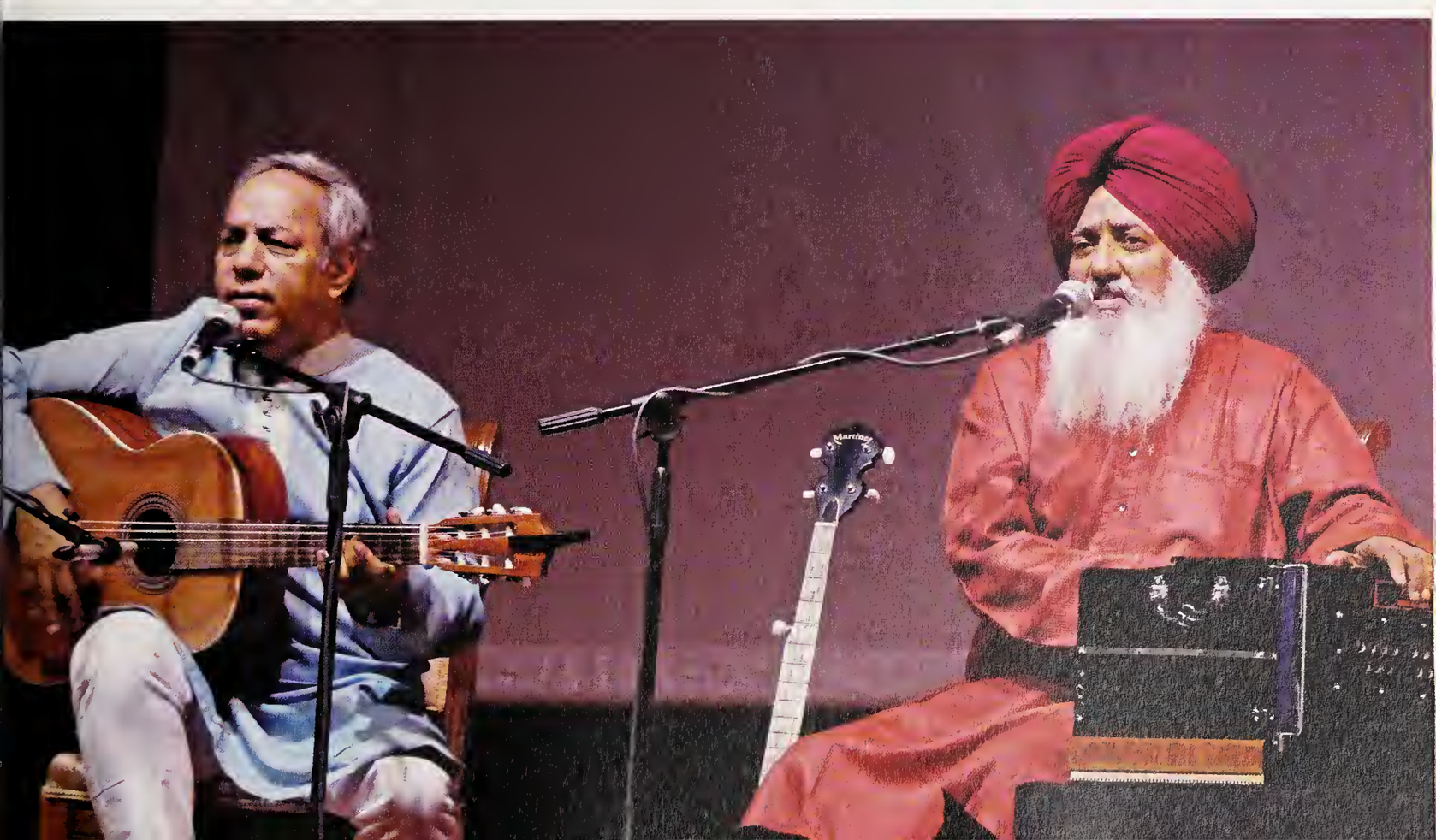
***Madan Gopal Singh** reminiscences,*
'Our music came out of our experience of the 1970s and 80s and a group of youngsters, like activist, poet and playwright Safdar Hashmi and artists Vivan Sundaram and Jagdish Swaminathan, and the influence of such discourses like structuralism and post-structuralism. We were in search of an alternative to the Anglo-American cultural paradigm and were still singing the leftist Indian People's Theatre Association's experimental songs, aimed at bringing a cultural awakening, of the 1950s. Coming out of the 1960s' anti-war and student movements all over



the world, we were in search of an identity, expressed through an original cultural manifestation. Looking for a musical expression, which could capture my feelings and the turmoil through which we were passing, I eventually made my choice—Sufi music rendered with modern and contemporary sensitivity.'[28]

With no apparent hierarchy, the performers as a group of equals did not follow the Sufi style of self-absorption or going into a trance, but presented their music with robust gestures and intensity, thus deeply engaging the audience.

Explaining the unique nature of his ensemble, Singh elaborates,
'The major point of departure was not to position myself as a vocalist at the centre of performance. I felt it was undemocratic. Our group gives equal status to the musicians and the vocalist. We always have a long opening prelude where our musicians just perform their expertise. For our repertoire, I do the research, but we all work in a democratic collaboration. Everyone can talk about the music and contribute to it.'[29]



20 August 2016

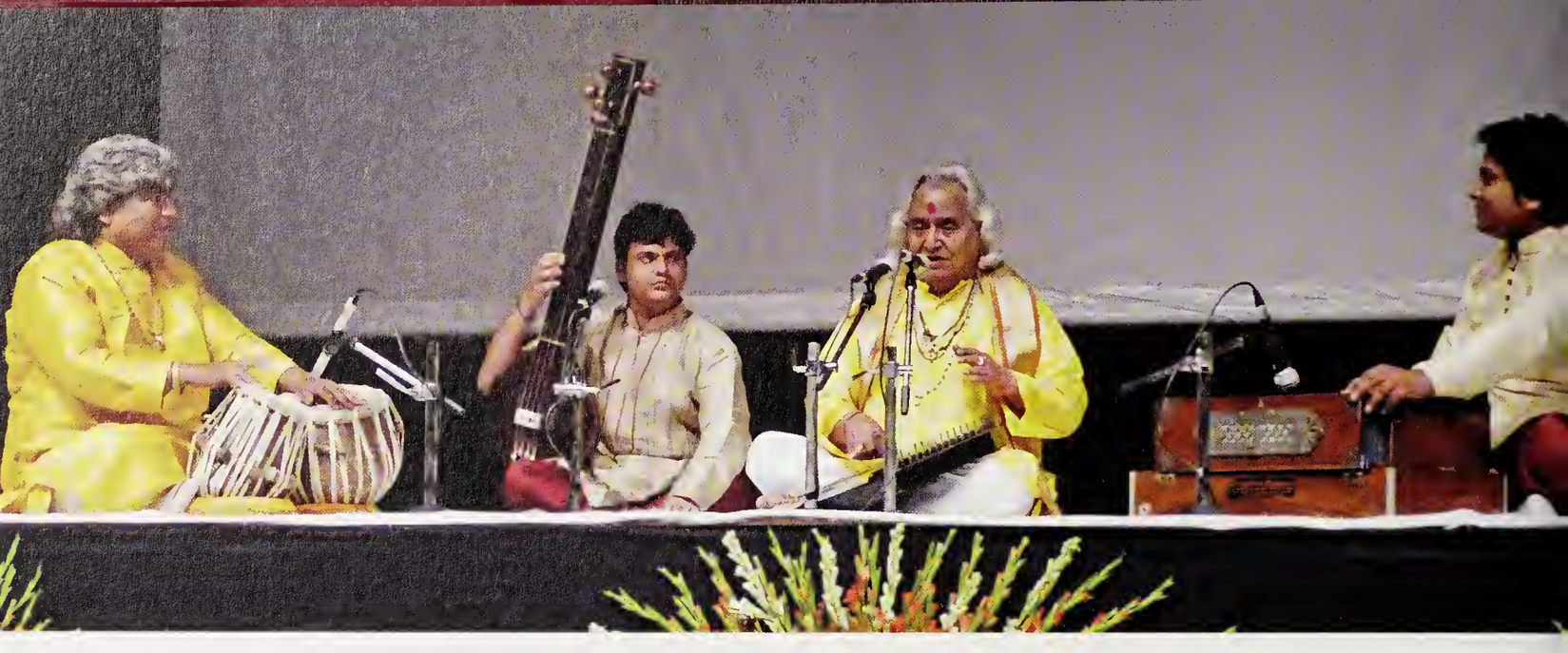
POETRY AND PIETY

Pandit Chhannulal Mishra

Pandit Chhannulal Mishra brings alive the aura of the city of Varanasi (also known as Banaras) through his music—the picturesque ghats, the temple bells, the pious devotees, the narrow alleys, the vast expanse of the river Ganga and the cultural kaleidoscope of many eras. History and mythology find a unique confluence in the music of Banaras. On the one hand, it is layered with local influences of folk music where genres like the thumri, dadra, chaiti, hori and kajri have evolved; on the other hand, it also carries a rich tradition of literature and poetry that blend into the musical canvas. In his concerts, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra presents this quintessential confluence of poetic interpretation and musical expression.

Born on 3 August 1936, in Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra was initiated into music by his father, Pandit Badri Prasad Mishra. Later, he became a disciple of Ustad Abdul Ghani Khan of the Kirana gharana. He was mentored by the renowned and revered musicologist, Thakur Jaidev Singh. Trained in various genres of Hindustani vocal music, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra specializes in thumri gayaki, *blending the Punjabi-*ang, *Purab-*ang *and Gaya thumri styles. He has received several accolades, including the Padma Bhushan in 2010.*





Talking about the early influences that shaped his music and perspective, he says, 'My father, Pandit Badri Prasad Mishra, was a tabla artist. His passion for music despite the odds he faced in life inspired me to learn music and follow the discipline of riyaaz. *He used to wake me up at four in the morning to practise music, and this became a way of life for me. My mother's interest in literature motivated me to study a number of texts that I often cite in my renditions even today.'*[30]

Another influence that has marked Pandit Chhannulal Mishra's music is the *gayaki* of the Indore gharana maestro, Ustad Amir Khan. Delving into the austere and devotional composition made popular by Ustad Amir Khan, *'Jai maate vilumbh'*, Pandit Chhannulal Mishra rendered Raga Hansadhwani as the opening piece of the concert at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Trained in *khayal gayaki* by Ustad Abdul Ghani Khan of the Kirana gharana, he eventually discovered his forte in other forms like the thumri and dadra that have greater lyrical content and emotional appeal. The *chhota khayal 'Jai Shiv Shankar'* was followed by intense portions of rhythm-play and *taankari*, concluding with a tarana.

The specialty of the Banaras style of music is the play with words in a composition. The artiste would offer multiple interpretations to the audience, often springing surprises with a variety of musical phrases that express the same lyrics through different perspectives. The thumri *'Vyakul bhayi braj bham, bansuria ab na bajao Shyam'* was a window into this world of poetry and music. Pandit Chhannulal Mishra presented eight different ways of expressing the same verse by taking on the role of eight characters—*gopika*s (cowherd girls) enamoured by Krishna's flute.

Commenting on the intricacies of the Banaras gayaki he says,
'We believe that sahitya *(literature) and* sangeet *(music) are two sides of the same coin. A number of musical techniques are employed to enhance the meaning of the words in a thumri. For instance,* pukaar *(calling out) is an important element of improvisation. It is situated somewhere between saying and singing.* Bol-banao *or improvising on one word in different ways, is another typical feature of Banaras.'*[31]



He concluded the thumri remembering and emulating the shehnai maestro from Banaras, Ustad Bismillah Khan.

The vibrant and playful energy of folk music enrich classical forms with colour and gaiety. They also provide insights into the local traditions and people's everyday lives. The Banarasi kajri, *'Barsan laagi badariya room jhoom ke'* welcomed the first showers of the monsoon. The lilting rhythm of the composition makes it such a popular musical piece of the community that it is often danced to. Forms like the thumri and kajri offer flexibility to blend different ragas and improvise freely without adhering to the strict raga grammar. In his rendition of the kajri, the vocalist offered glimpses of the raga of the rainy season—Malhar.

The celebration of the monsoon segued into the festivity of Holi. Most Holi compositions in classical music revolve around the playful antics of Krishna. Pandit Chhannulal Mishra presented a rare hori that depicted Shiva playing Holi, '*Shankar khelen masaane mein holi*'. With a vast repertoire, he has compositions to suit every mood and audience.

> ***Sharing his views on the selection of compositions for each performance he says,***
> *'When the audience applauds heartily, an artiste knows that he has connected with their pulse. It is important to understand this rather than ignore audience tastes. Sometimes, the audience is not engaged in long raga elaborations. Forms like the thumri, on the other hand, are much easier to comprehend and enjoy. While it is important to maintain the purity of the classical genre, it is equally essential that the audience is entertained and finds the performance enjoyable.'*[32]

A favourite of audiences across cities, he makes his performances interactive, narrating stories and inviting the audience to join in. Over the years he has garnered a huge fan following and strikes a fine balance between engaging the curious layman and enthralling the discerning connoisseur.

Accompanying artistes

Tabla: Pandit Ram Kumar Mishra

Harmonium: Indresh Mishra

24 September 2016

ANCIENT STRINGS WITH A NEW SONG

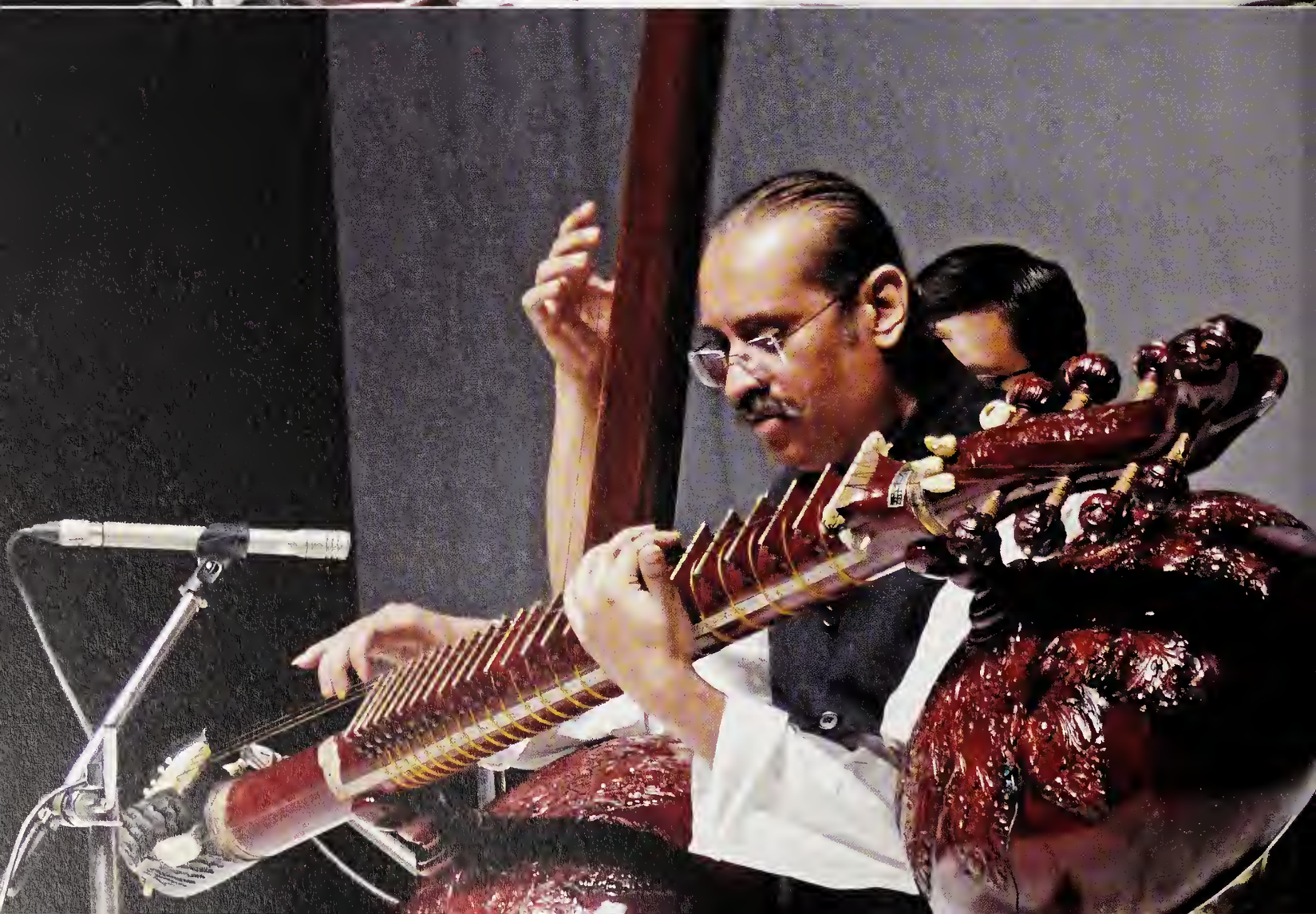
Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar

The deep reverberating sound of the rudra veena filled the Rashtrapati Bhavan auditorium, creating a calm and contemplative ambience. One of the few beenkars (veena player) of the present generation, Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar hails from the illustrious musical tradition known as the Dagar Bani. Tracing its lineage back to many generations of musicianship, the Dagar Bani is known for preserving and propagating the Hindustani music genre—dhrupad. Not an easy form to master, dhrupad takes years of rigorous training, disciplined study and patience for a student to begin performing professionally. The concluding concert of the Indra Dhanush series offered a new future to this ancient music tradition of dhrupad.

Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar is a rudra veena exponent of the Dagar Bani tradition of dhrupad music. Disciple and son of the dhrupad maestro Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar and nephew of the acclaimed vocalist Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar, his initial training was in sitar from his mother, Pramila Dagar. His father had established a gurukul in Palaspe, Maharashtra, where Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar now teaches both vocal and instrumental forms in the dhrupad genre. He was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for 2012–13.







***Reflecting on the concert, the musician** says,*
'It is extremely kind of the President to have invited me to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The rudra veena is a rare instrument today and does not have many practising musicians. A rudra veena concert at the Rashtrapati Bhavan is special and historic because it could change the perception of the ordinary people regarding the instrument by drawing attention to its uniqueness and specialties.'[33]

Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar does not decide his concert repertoire beforehand. He is guided by intuition, the ambience and the audience. For him, improvising on a raga is akin to expanding an idea. Raga Puriya Kalyan was his selection for the evening. A modern raga that started gaining popularity in the 1940s, Puriya Kalyan expresses a peaceful and introspective mood. A performance that invited the audience into the intriguing world of a rare music style, it also generated an inward-looking impulse.

The rudra veena is an ancient string instrument, earlier known as the *been*. A number of mythological tales attribute the origin of the instrument to Shiva from where it also draws its name 'rudra'. Historically, the instrument has been traced back to at least the thirteenth–fourteenth centuries and connected with the musical tradition of the ascetics and saints. It moved into the royal courts later and received patronage that enabled the enhancement of playing techniques and embedded it within the raga system of Hindustani music.

Each instrumentalist shares a special relationship with their musical instrument. For some it is a muse, while others even confide in their instruments as friends. Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar finds a sense of history, identity and deep emotional attachment to his rudra veena. The particular instrument Dagar plays, follows his father and first guru, Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar's design. He brought about a number of changes in the playing technique, posture, as well as the construction of the instrument. Using teak wood instead of bamboo, placing an additional *chikari* string, changing the dimensions of the strings, frets and gourds of the *been*, the veena he developed produced and sustained a deep reverberating sound that resembled the the human voice. The first instrument with this design was made for Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar by the renowned instrument maker Nitaibabu Kanailal in 1963. He was also the first one to shift the traditional posture of playing the instrument by holding it under his right arm and across his chest, to the Carnatic music posture of holding the veena in the lap.

***Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar** recalls that the change in posture altered his approach to music,*
'When I hold the instrument, I can connect instantly to my father, my musical heritage. The changes he made impacted the rudra veena playing methods immensely and personally transformed my approach to music. From the earlier stroke-based style of the sitar and surbahar, I started moving towards the more pensive and alaap*-dominated approach.'*[34]

The immersive *alaap* was followed by the *jod*, *jhala* and the *gat* set to chautaal (12-beat rhythm cycle). Initially trained in a different instrumental style on the sitar and surbahar by his mother, Pramila Dagar, Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar later started training in vocal music and the rudra veena. Though he does not usually sing in his performances, vocal music forms an integral aspect of his pedagogy.

Deeply devoted to enriching the dhrupad tradition and passing it on to posterity, the maestro divides his time between performing and teaching. He believes that it is important to breathe life into an art form, to accept tradition, and energize it with a fresh approach and practice.

He says,

'The usual perception about dhrupad is that since it is a traditional and ancient form, it is rather rigid and fixed. For me as a musician, it is the form that has set me free. By magnifying the nuances of the raga, it offers deep insights into the detailing of notes and their movements. One of the things about dhrupad that makes it so special is that you play the music in front of an audience, but not just for the audience. Music is about inviting people to share your experience, and by doing that, each one's intimate space expands.'[35]

Accompanying artiste
Pakhawaj: Anil Chaudhary




INDRA DHANUSH
AN ODE TO INDIA'S TIMELESS CULTURAL HERITAGE
RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN, NEW DELHI.

FROM THE SHADOWS TO THE SPOTLIGHT

The Art of Accompaniment

'An Ode to India's Timeless Cultural Heritage'

The words are displayed brightly behind Madan Gopal Singh and the ensemble Chaar Yaar during their performance at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 9 July 2016. Four musicians on the stage, all sitting on equally raised rostrums with their instruments, Madan Gopal Singh introduces the music, yet it is not clear who the main artiste is. They all appear to be equal collaborators. Is this unique in the performance culture scenario or why is it so prominently highlighted? Does this in any way represent a growing trend not only amongst groups like Chaar Yaar but also a classical performance culture, which is seen as an unchanging tradition not only in its repertoire but in its codes of behaviour.

Madan Gopal Singh taught at Delhi University for nearly three decades and for all practical purpose leads the group; he is a lyricist, scriptwriter, music composer and a vocalist. He subsequently joined hands with Deepak Castelino (guitar, western music), Pritam Ghoshal (sarod) and Amjad A. Khan (tabla) to create an ensemble of 'collaborators'. Explaining the reason behind preferring the term 'collaborators' over 'accompanying artistes', Amjad Khan, [36] tabla maestro, says, 'All four of us in the group are the main artistes. We represent our own musical genre. We try to encourage and inspire each other's art and do not indulge in showing individual mastery or overshadowing each other. That's why we call ourselves collaborators.'

The Chaar Yaar ensemble featuring musicians Madan Gopal Singh (vocals), Deepak Castelino (guitar), Amjad Khan (tabla) and Pritam Ghoshal (sarod) performing at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 9 July 2016

This indeed is a path-breaking thought and a unique conviction in the world of music. Although the Chaar Yaar represents a radical departure from conventions or what was the accepted notion of accompaniment, I would argue that this is a resonance of an emerging trend, a shift in the perception of 'accompaniment'. 'The equivalent of accompanying in Hindi is *sangat* and this means to walk together (*saath chalna*),' explains Vinay Kumar Mishra, [37] harmonium maestro, who accompanied Ustad Rashid Khan (9 February 2016). 'As accompanying artistes we support, like a shadow, we walk with the main artiste. And like a shadow we give confidence to the main artiste. In our efforts at times we succeed, at times we do not. But in a nutshell, the good accompanying artiste is one who supports the main artiste and does not try to overshadow him.'

Here, it would not be wrong to say that accompanists were earlier considered mere shadows of the main artistes, be it in classical music or dance, but in recent times, the art of accompaniment has been increasingly acknowledged and given due respect. In a way, this piece is to recognize the musicians who supported the masters in the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Indra Dhanush II series. While interacting with them I came to comprehend that there is a considerable shift and while acknowledging the artistes and their contributions, I will also try to see it as an important moment of transition. It is an attempt to see the musical or dance recitals as collaborative work, which has reached its zenith because of the collective entity and collaborative efforts of everyone involved.

Over the last few decades, we have noticed that a few maestros raised the bar for accompaniment, and subsequently acquired individual status as soloists. Yet in the vast galaxy of the classical genre these are rare examples but over the last decade I would say that accompanists are now given more recognition and acknowledged not only for their proficiency, which is above board if you are playing with any of the maestros, but more space and scope to perform in any concert. There is a general shift in the performance practice and reflects in a cultural sociology. A manifestation of this trend reflects in the Indra Dhanush II series.

The probable reason why it was at all possible to break the rigid performance parameters of the classical traditional gharana paradigm is also because of the inherent strength of





classical music to grant freedom within the framework of the raga system. This enables the accompanying artistes to maintain their originality while complementing the main artiste. There is space for a musical dialogue between all the artistes that can provide them a scope to perform on an equal footing and enrich the music itself. Consequently, artistes are attempting to break out of the earlier limited role of the accompanists and to make music with each other as collaborators. Many of the music performances in Indra Dhanush II provided such a democratic performance space to the artistes and can be seen as a harbinger of this new trend.

Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan (1908–2016), representing the sixteenth generation of Miyan Tansen's lineage, performed in May 2015 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan and could be regarded as symbolizing a historical trajectory. Though he belonged to the Gwalior gharana, his style was remarkably unique. Says Subhomoy Bhattacharya, [38] who gave vocal accompaniment to the late Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, 'Baba, as we lovingly called Ustadji, was a composer, poet, guru and a vocalist. He composed more than 2000 *bandishes* under the pseudonym "Rasan Piya". He was adept in the khayal, dhrupad, dhamaar and thumri. Though he belonged to the Gwalior gharana, *gamak*, *phirat* and *layakari* had an unmistakable tinge of Baba's individuality. Baba's was a style that reminded one of the good old days when ragas were as precious as gold; when gharanas maintained a separate identity; when artistes created music from the narrow alleys of the gharana boundary and yet produced original music.'

Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan, when he performed at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, was no less than 106 years old. His vocal accompanist, his senior student Subhomoy Bhattacharya effortlessly assumed a responsibility to supplement the musical recital to give respite to the legendary maestro whenever it was required. 'I am trying to emulate his style and thoughts. Having said

Vocalist Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan accompanied by Subhomoy Chatterjee (vocals), Murad Ali (sarangi), Zameer Ahmed Khan (harmonium) and Bilal Khan (tabla) performing at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 16 May 2015



that, let me clarify that as accompanying artistes we give support. At the same time, we must try to carve our own style. Even Baba did not like it when I was following him blindly. Once he told me, "*Apni gayaki mein gaao*" (sing in your own style). He used to give ample space in between his music to us—accompanying artistes—to create and show our talent.'

The questions that arise are: who is a good accompanying artiste and what is the role of an accompanying artiste? How is the tenuous balance between complementary accompaniment and showing your own skills maintained and sustained? The fact is that accompaniment is quite a challenging task. In fact, according to the late Sarangi Nawaz Ustad Sabri Khan, who accompanied almost all the yesteryear legends—Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Ustad Amir Khan, Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur, Ustad Aminuddin Dagar and Ustad Moinuddin Dagar, Ustad Rahimuddin Dagar, Vidushi Mogubai Kurdikar and Vidushi Kishori Amonkar and many others—'Accompaniment is more difficult than playing solo. It is an art. One learns it with experience. If one is a soloist, it is enough to know a few ragas but as an accompanying artiste, one must know many ragas because all artistes have their own repertoire. The interpretations of ragas and the knowledge of different *taal*s are very essential. To be a good accompanying artiste, apart from knowledge and talent, one must also have great presence of mind.' [39]

Accompaniment is an art and the prerequisite for an accompanying artiste is to be in complete sync with the main artiste. Subhomoy Bhattacharya used to spend days and months with his guru. He accompanied his guru on various concert platforms and often experienced the stage as a music class. He says, 'Often the stage was converted into a virtual music class. Initially, I was very frightened as I didn't know what he would sing or where was I expected to give vocal support. But as I spent so much time with him, I gradually began to understand his moods and which *bandish* he would present in a particular concert.'

Vocalist Ustad Rashid Khan accompanied by Krishna Bongane (vocals), Pandit Subhankar Banerjee (tabla), Vinay Kumar Mishra (harmonium) and Murad Ali (sarangi) performing at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, 9 February 2016.

To be able to support the lead artiste, accompanying performers require a sound knowledge of ragas and *raagdaari*. Our traditional Hindustani music highlights ragas in accordance with time and ragas depict a particular mood. To create that musical 'bliss', a high degree of *swar sadhana* is required so that the musician forgets his corporeal identity and listeners experience an aesthetic transformation. In order to ignite such a feeling, the musician and the accompanying artistes need to be insightful and should have been trained in the finer nuances of the *raagdaari* system and different repertoires. Corroborating this aspect, Murad Ali, [40] the sarangi maestro who accompanied Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan as well as Ustad Rashid Khan during their performances at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, comments, 'For an accompanying artiste, deep knowledge and versatility about ragas and the *raagdaari* system is essential.'

In fact, each raga embodies fundamental aesthetic principles. This pertains to a particular sound to which listeners respond. This is validated by the fact that ragas are not coincidental combinations of characteristics but a conscious selection of notes, phrases and other characteristics. This is proved by the fact that arbitrary combinations of notes, which do not embody the raga principle, do not survive. Each raga, therefore, represents a musical entity, a tonal complexity, pervaded by its own atmosphere. This is referred to as the *ragabhava*. [41] Musicians concentrate on this *ragabhava* in the course of practice and performance, so as to make it manifest in their music. There is a well-known story about Raga Deepak—if sung with great emotion it not only lights lamps but can also set the singer aflame. I read this as a three-way complex communication between the lead singer, his collaborators and his audience, which requires an intense sharing of emotions and impulses, that can arouse an effective response.

The point, which comes across from all the interviews of the accompanying artistes, is that ragas have their own aesthetic value and effect and accompanying artistes are also expected to understand the ragas and the response it can evoke, besides completely understanding the gharana *gayaki* and the thought process of the vocalist. 'Even within the precincts of *raagdaari,* there's discipline and there's freedom within discipline. And the accompaniment is also done within the discipline of *raagdaari*, with freedom and an understanding of the guru's *gayaki* and imagination,' says Vinay Kumar Mishra.

There are no schools to provide specific training in the art of accompaniment. Musical education is always imparted in a way that develops the student as a solo artiste. Since earlier times, instruments like the sarangi, harmonium and the tabla, have been considered as only accompanying instruments. It goes to the credit of a handful of artistes like Ustad Alla Rakha, Pandit Kishen Maharaj, Ustad Sabri Khan, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pandit Appa Jalgaonkar, Pandit Arawind Thatte and a few other 'revolutionary' maestros, that the sarangi, tabla and the harmonium with the passage of time acquired the status of solo instruments, too. Gone are the days when accompanying artistes were not treated well. The scenario is changing—and now, accompanying performers have started calling themselves collaborators. And it is not a mere change in nomenclature as I am arguing. They provide support to each other's music and have an equal role and space to explore and experiment. They do not wait for that one glance by the main artiste to display their musical expertise. Perhaps, this is just

the beginning of classical music becoming a more democratic space where 'classical groups' would accommodate new experiments and explorations within the parameters of *raagdaari* freedom. In a way, they are moving away from the accepted definition of the accompanying artiste—of being 'a shadow' of the main artiste. Moreover, if one observes the trend closely, then it would not be wrong to agree with a few artistes who believe that any concert is a joint endeavour by the instrumentalists and the vocalists and that there should be no discrimination. Often organizers or main artistes forget to introduce accompanying performers on the stage. In the curtain call ceremony, smaller bouquets are kept for the accompanying maestros. Just to go back a little, to an anecdote, it was because of this 'discrimination' that many years ago Pandit Jasraj, who began his musical journey as a tabla player, decided to become a soloist, a vocalist.

Although there are broad rules about being an accompanying artiste, it primarily depends on individual performers to turn soloist or take up accompanying. Sarangi maestro Murad Ali says, 'We all learn music as a soloist. If the work of an accompanying musician is exquisite, then one is respected not only by the main maestro but by the audience and organizers too. What matters is a strong musical foundation that eventually catapults one to turn a soloist,' agrees Amjad Khan, the tabla maestro, 'It primarily depends on the mindset.'

The art of being an exceptional accompanying artiste comes with experience, but when accompanying maestros acquire a soloist stature, they have an advantage, 'The fact is that a good *sangat kalakaar* (accompanying artiste) when s/he graduates to becoming a solo artiste, would be a repository of the invaluable treasure of different gharanas. Their repertoire is very vast as they have accompanied vocalists belonging to different lineages,' says Murad Ali.

Undoubtedly, stylistic diversity and improvisation within the broad unified framework of the classical art forms, particularly in Hindustani classical music, has always been an integral part of our tradition. Artistes—soloists and accompanying artistes/collaborators—have dedicated their lives to the cause of the enhancement of traditional music as well as enriched the traditional craft with their own performances. Often in brief portions within a concert, accompanying musicians/collaborators mesmerize the audience with their unexpected improvisations and individual virtuosity. As accompanists, they support and provide the foundation to the main artiste's performance. The opportunity to provide *sangat* to a great maestro often enriches the accompanying artistes. And as collaborators, musicians have mutual respect for each other's art and act as pillars for each other.

Accompanying artistes, collaborator or solo artistes—they all have one thing in common. They are all musicians. The mode of exposition and presentation may differ, yet the eternal values of music remain the same. They all pursue their passion, share a common artistic vocabulary and it is a moment of great honour and glory for them to perform at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. 'It was indeed a matter of great pride for us,' was the view expressed by all the accompanying artistes and artistes who performed at the prestigious venue. As part of the Indra Dhanush series, several performances by great maestros have been held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and it is indeed an ode to the collaborator-maestros and acknowledging that the level of music, which the audience experienced, required a high level of expertise and mastery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To realise the vision of this unique publication, we, the editor and the contributors, owe a debt for special expertise and inspiration to many.

First and foremost, the President's Secretariat. Their articulation of the conceptual direction through the journey of making the dossier was extraordinary. We are thankful to the internal financial advisor, Siddharth Sharma, for enriching the publication with his valuable suggestions. The staff of the Record Room, Multimedia Centre and Photo Section at the Rashtrapati Bhavan made tremendous contribution with their dedication and constant support.

We would like to express our gratitude to the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, including the former and present member secretaries, Dipali Khanna and Sachchidanand Joshi, and the steering committee for the project, as well as the Sahapedia team, who have supported the work of writing and production in several stages. The Sahapedia team to whom we would like to extend profound thanks include the project director, Dr Sudha Gopalakrishnan, the project manager, Dr Yashaswini Chandra, and the project coordinator, Akanksha Thapa and Gaurav Ujjainwal.

We also owe a special thanks to our dear colleagues and students at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, who have engaged with us on a number of performances and contributed according to their individual specialisations to the writings: Prof. Samik Bandyopadhyay, Prof. Partha Datta, Dr Ameet Parameswaran, Dr Urmimala Sarkar and Prof. H.S. Shivaprakash.

GLOSSARY

Aakaar	To sing the melodic structure by using 'aa' only. Words of the text are not used.
Abhinaya	The art, discipline, principles and practice of acting, particularly enactments in both theatre and dance.
Alaap	The beginning of the composition where the singer explores the raga without any musical accompaniment.
Alarippu	The term literally means 'blossoming bud'. It is an invocatory piece in the Bharatanatyam dance repertoire that focuses on the movements of the neck, eyes, hands and the basic postures of the dance form, concluding with vibrant footwork.
Antara	The second section of a composition.
Ashtang	Eight-fold style of singing. The Gwalior gharana gayaki is known for it.
Bandish	Literally, restriction, minimal composition in north Indian classical music, particularly lyrical text that is sung, composed usually in Brijbhasa or Bhojpuri dialects of Hindi, providing space for musical elaboration.
Been	Veena or rudra veena. (Though now commonly the word 'been' is used for the instrument played by snake charmers).
Beenkar	String instrument player.
Behlava	Using words of the composition in the alaap to expand on the mood of the composition.
Bhaav	Expression of the various layers of emotions.

Bhakti movement	A series of socio-spiritual awakenings that happened at different times and places in India between the seventh to the nineteenth centuries. They evolved a system of values and practices centering around the Cosmic Divine, personified as a deity (Saguna) or seen as formless (Nirguna). This love was expressed through different popular arts: poetry, music, dance and theatre. They evolved simple religious practices like temple-going, collective dance/singing and gatherings of followers. They endeared themselves to everyone as they spoke in the everyday language of common people. Apart from generating alternative aesthetic practices, bhakti streams created alternative democratic spaces for men and women from all walks of life in a society divided by exploitative caste/gender hierarchies.
Bol	Words of a song.
Bol banao	Expressive usage of words to convey emotions; largely used in thumri.
Chikari	Literally means 'high-pitched'. On an instrument, it means a high drone string, primarily used for rhythmic clarity.
Classical dances	Classical status was initially accorded to four dance forms, namely, Kathakali, Kathak, Bharatanatyam and Manipuri but now includes four more, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Sattriya and Mohiniattam.
Chakkars	Spins and pirouettes.
Chakradhar	Pure dance sequence in Kathak, where there are several pirouettes.
Chhau	Dance form spread over Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha, with stylistic variations/characteristics, marked by locales, namely, Purulia Chhau and Seraikella Chhau, both masked, and Mayurbhanj Chhau, unmasked and with painted bodies, danced to themes mainly drawn from the epics and the Puranas.
Dadra	A rhythmic cycle of six beats. A form of classical music.
Dagar bani	Gharana of the dhrupad genre of Hindustani music.
Dandiya Ras	A popular form from Gujarat in which dancers dance in circles with sticks.
Dhamal	Song about Sufi saint.

Dhamaar	A lilting rhythmic cycle in north Indian classical music with 14 beats grouped 5-2-3-4 beginning with ka instead of dha and played on the pakhawaj; compositions set to this taal are often sung after a dhrupad also called Hori-dhamar or pakhi hori.
Dhrupad	Traditional north Indian classical musical form usually set to 12 beats.
Dohe	Couplets (two-line verses).
Drut	Fast tempo.
Gamak	Literally, fragrance; vocal embellishment that employs a vibrating effect with notes.
Garba	Popular dance form of Gujarat, performed during Navratra festivities by participants dancing in circular or spiral movements. It literally means the womb, or gestation, and refers to life cycles. In recent times it has undergone commercialization and corporatization.
Gat	In Indian classical music, a musical composition; in Kathak dance, expressional sequence, depicting cameos of daily life.
Gayaki	Singing style.
Gharana	Literally, family, clan; any one of the many schools of Hindustani music and dance, each marked by a distinctive voice throw, style of singing or dancing and approach to music, and with a tradition of gurus; drawing their names from various towns and cities of India where the originator of the style lived or the style had a royal or feudal patron; for example, Gwalior, Agra, Jaipur, Kirana, Bhindibazar, Rampur, Vishnupur. Initially, sons and members of the family alone were allowed to carry the tradition forward; over the years the guru–shishya parampara or tradition has come to welcome outsiders.
Ghazal	Form of music where lyrics are largely derived from Urdu poetry.
Gotipua	Dance form from Odisha performed by pre-adolescent boys dressed as women, using acrobatic formations, graceful codified movements; regarded as one of the forms which went into reconstruction of the classical Odissi dance.

Gunijankhana	Royal department or establishment (in Jaipur) for performing artists. Artists who were granted royal patronage were expected to perform at state events and social festivals; they were paid a retainer and generally were expected to report daily for duty.
Gurukul	In the present-day context, traditional music school. Earlier, all education was imparted in India in gurukuls where the disciples stayed with the guru at his/her place, learning the art, craft and technique.
Haveli sangeet	A form of Hindustani classical music usually dedicated to Krishna, primarily sung in palaces or mansions.
Hori	Form of music where lyrics relate to Holi, the Hindu festival of colours.
Jhala	Fast-paced conclusion of a classical rendition.
Jod	Also written as jor. The four sections of classical music are alaap, jod, gat and jhala. Jod is the portion of instrumental piece in which the rhythm begins. Since it does not have a fully developed cycle, it is not accompanied by tabla.
Jugalbandi	Duet.
Kathakata	Recitation of mythological stories with annotations, particularly in eastern India.
Kerala Kandamandalam	Residential learning centre (guru–shishya paramapara in a contemporary context) specializing in Kerala performing forms, particularly Kathakali, with its own repertory company.
Kerala Natanam	A new dance form constructed and established in the 1990s out of existing Kerala art forms such as Mohiniattam, Kathakali and Bharatanatyam that has become popular in Kerala.
Khayal	Literally, imagination, whim, mediation: the most challenging musical form in north Indian classical music, demanding a high order of improvisational skill at several levels and layers of the raga and the scope of which covers the whole range of human experience from the mystic to mathematical and intellectual exploration.

Lai Haraoba	Seasonal Manipuri festival, held once a year, with an elaborate scenario of rituals, dances and music, the term derived from Lai (deity), Hoi (the inner vibration), laaba (loud utterance); celebrating the deities of the Meitei religion, and enacting myths of origin and creation.
Laya	Pace or tempo of the rhythm.
Layakari	Rhythmic virtuosity using words of a composition, vocal or instrumental.
Lavani	A form of musical composition; also used for dance.
Lodi dynasty	Rulers of Afghan origin: the reigns of Buhlul Lodi (1451–1489), Sikandar Lodi (1489–1517) and Ibrahim Lodi (1517–1526), regarded as the last dynasty of the Delhi sultanate reduced to a regional identity. Their reign was characterized by numerous battles, territorial conquests of Gwalior, Jaunpur, Punjab and Bihar, and fight against Rajput chiefs and Afghan nobles. They were defeated by the first Mughal ruler, Babar, in the Battle of Panipat in 1526.
Madhya laya	Medium tempo.
Manganiyars	Performers from a Muslim community bound to Hindu Rajput families in Sindh and Rajasthan; their songs portray the history of the master family, its daily life, festivals and marriage rituals, and in praise of Hindu gods and Muslim saints.
Margam Kali	A community group dance performed by the Syrian Christian community of Kerala. The Syrian Christian community traces the origin to St Thomas Apostle, the disciple of Christ, and the dance predominantly deals with the community's early history.
Meend	Slow glide that connects two notes.
Murki	Ornamentation around the main note through quick movements between notes.
Oppana	Muslim group dance performed both by men and women on the occasion of a wedding.
Padam	A form of musical composition in Carnatic music. The lyrical content is usually romantic or devotional and are part of the Bharatanatyam repertoire.
Pakhawaj	A double-headed barrel-shaped percussion instrument. A drum primarily used in dhrupad recitals.

Pandavani	Balladic, musical narration by a solo performer, based on parts/ episodes of the Mahabharata, popular in Madhya Pradesh.
Pandit	In the context of Hindustani music, it is the title given to a learned musician.
Patua geeti	Folk songs sung by scroll painters in West Bengal, Odisha and Bangladesh.
Phirat	Literally, a turn, to turn around; meandering taan patterns, especially in ragas that have a complex gait.
Purab-ang	Form of singing. As this style emerged from Varanasi, which is to the east of Lucknow, it came to be known as Purab-ang. It is largely used for thumri gayaki, just as the Punjabi-ang and Gaya styles are.
Qual	An Arabic word that mean utterance. It refers to songs that are full of praise for God. The term 'Qawwali' is derived from this word.
Qawwali	A form of Sufi devotional music.
Raagdari	The technique and art of raga delineation.
Raga	The melodic modes used in classical music, consisting of particular scale notes. The literal meaning is colour, hue or shade. Figuratively, it means something that colours our emotions.
Rang	The term literally means 'colour'. In the context of Qawwali it refers to the compositions by Amir Khusro that celebrate becoming a disciple of Nizamuddin. The song evokes joy.
Riyaaz	Practice.
Sagun	Sagun is a sect of bhakti that conceptualizes the deity in the anthropomorphic forms as opposed to. Nirguna bhakti or worshipping an abstract God.
Sahitya	Literature.
Sangat	Accompaniment.
Sangeet	Music.
Saptak	A group of seven notes.
Sargam	Term for the seven notes of the saptak.
Sthayi	Beginning or initial phrase of a fixed melodic structure in Indian classical music.
Sur/Swar	Note or pitch.

Surbahar	String instrument, quite similar to the sitar. It has a larger resonance box.
Swarmandal	String instrument. It is used by vocalists to give pitch support.
Swar sadhana	Practice of notes.
Taal	The rhythmic metric cycle used in Indian classical music.
Taleem	Education or training.
Taan	A rapid series of notes used in vocal and instrumental music.
Taankari	The craft and artistry in using taan.
Tabla	The pair of drums used in Hindustani classical music. It consists of the bayan, left-hand drum and dayan, the right-hand drum.
Tanpura	A long-necked string instrument, played by continuously plucking the strings. It is used for providing the drone notes.
Tappa	One of the genres of classical music. The lyrics are in Punjabi language, as its origin is traced to the folk songs of camel-drivers of the Punjab–Sindh area. It was popularized by Ghulam Nabi Shori (Shori Mian), who was the court singer of Nawab Asaf Ud-Daullah of Lucknow (1776–1797).
Tarana	Genre of classical music that uses vocables or drum syllables. It is performed in a medium or fast tempo.
Tatkar	Footwork in Kathak.
Thiruvathirakali	Women's group dance performed by Hindu women on the occasion of Thiruvathira, a festival linked to Shiva and Parvati, in the Malayalam month of Dhanu (December–January).
Thumri	Originally associated with ankle bells, or the dance this idiom later captured, becoming a part of the repertoires of the north Indian light classical music, particularly under the influence of Ustad Abdul Karim Khan of the Kirana gharana in the twentieth century. Composed in dialectics like Brijbhasa, the romantic lyrics demand all the skills of a classical musician along with a delicate emotional appeal obtained by a mix of ragas.
Vadyamanjari	Medley of rhythms played on percussion instruments.
Vilambit	Slow tempo setting of a composition with rhythmic accompaniment.
Wari Liba	Traditional story-telling by artistes from Manipur

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4. She was referring to the time she turned down the Sangeet Natak Akademi award in 2012, which was awarded to her for contemporary dance and not her contributions to Kathak. Interview, 21 May 2016.
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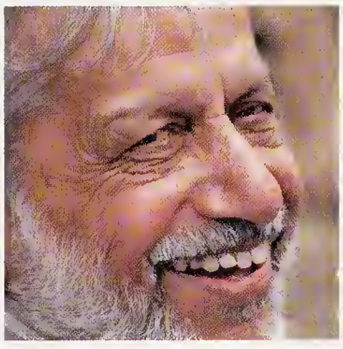


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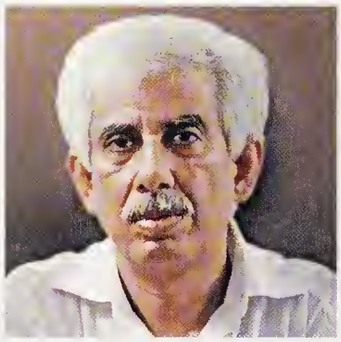
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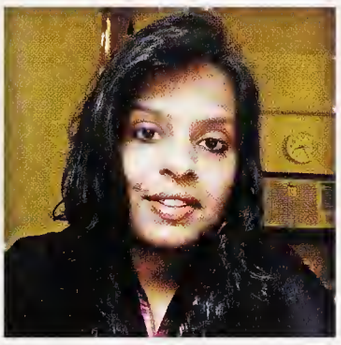
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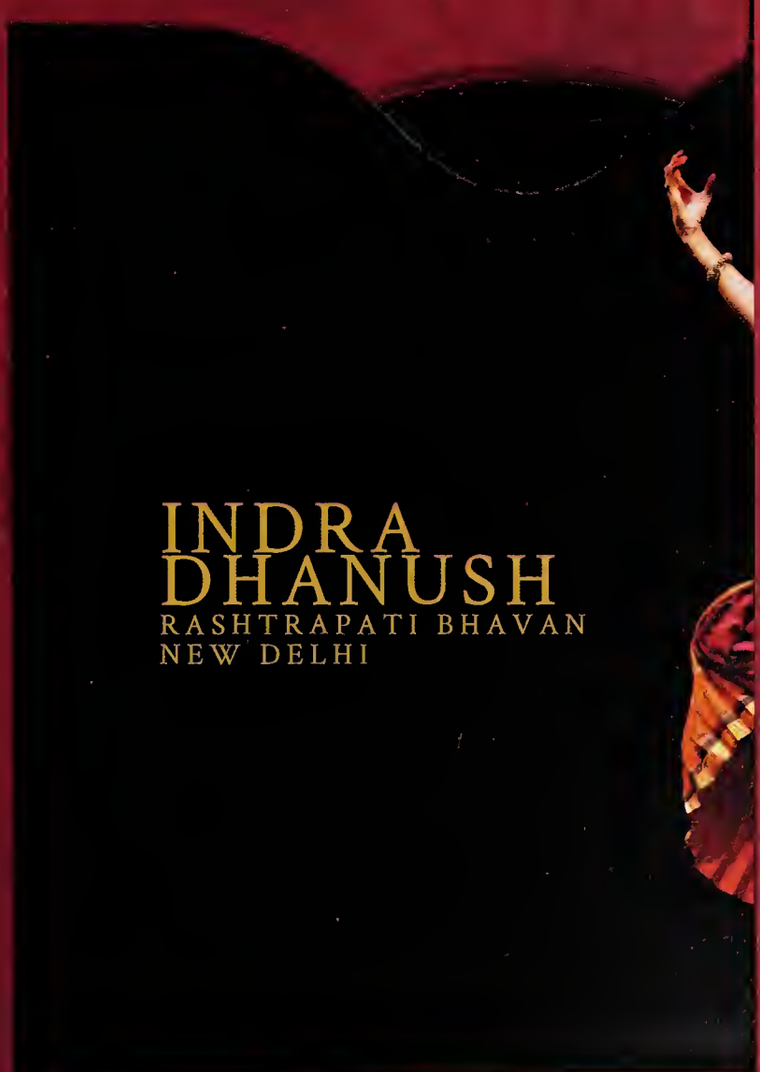
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INDRA DHANUSH II

DVD with excerpts from selected performances

Pandits Rajan and Sajan Mishra
(Hindustani vocal)
Bhagwati Stotram

Pandit Jasraj (Hindustani vocal)
Khayal in Raga Adana

Ustad Abdul Rashid Khan (Hindustani vocal)
Khayal in Raga Shankara-Bihag

Begum Parveen Sultana (Hindustani vocal)
Sadra in Raga Bhairavi

Ustad Rashid Khan (Hindustani vocal)
Thumri

Pandit Ulhas Kashalkar (Hindustani vocal)
Bandish-ki-Thumri

Pandit Chhannulal Mishra (Hindustani vocal)
Hori

Ustad Baha'ud-din Dagar
(Hindustani instrumental-Rudra Veena)
Dhrupad

Chaar Yaar Ensemble (Sufi)
Song of Bridges

Aditi Mangaldas Dance Company (Kathak)
Tarana

Priyadarsini Govind (Bharatanatyam)
Devi Stotram

Ao Naga Choir (Christmas songs)
Christmas Hymn







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